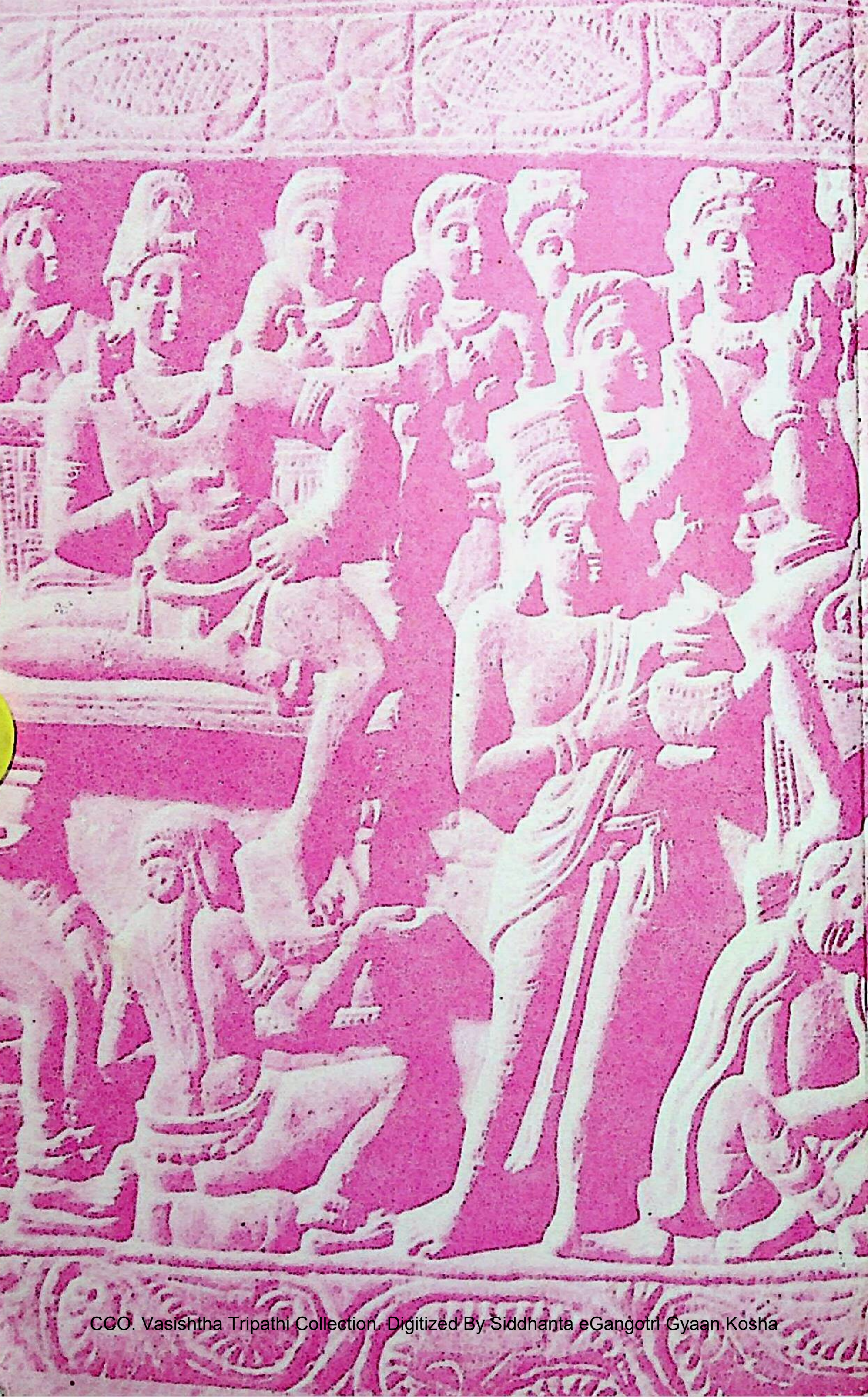
SELECTED POEMS

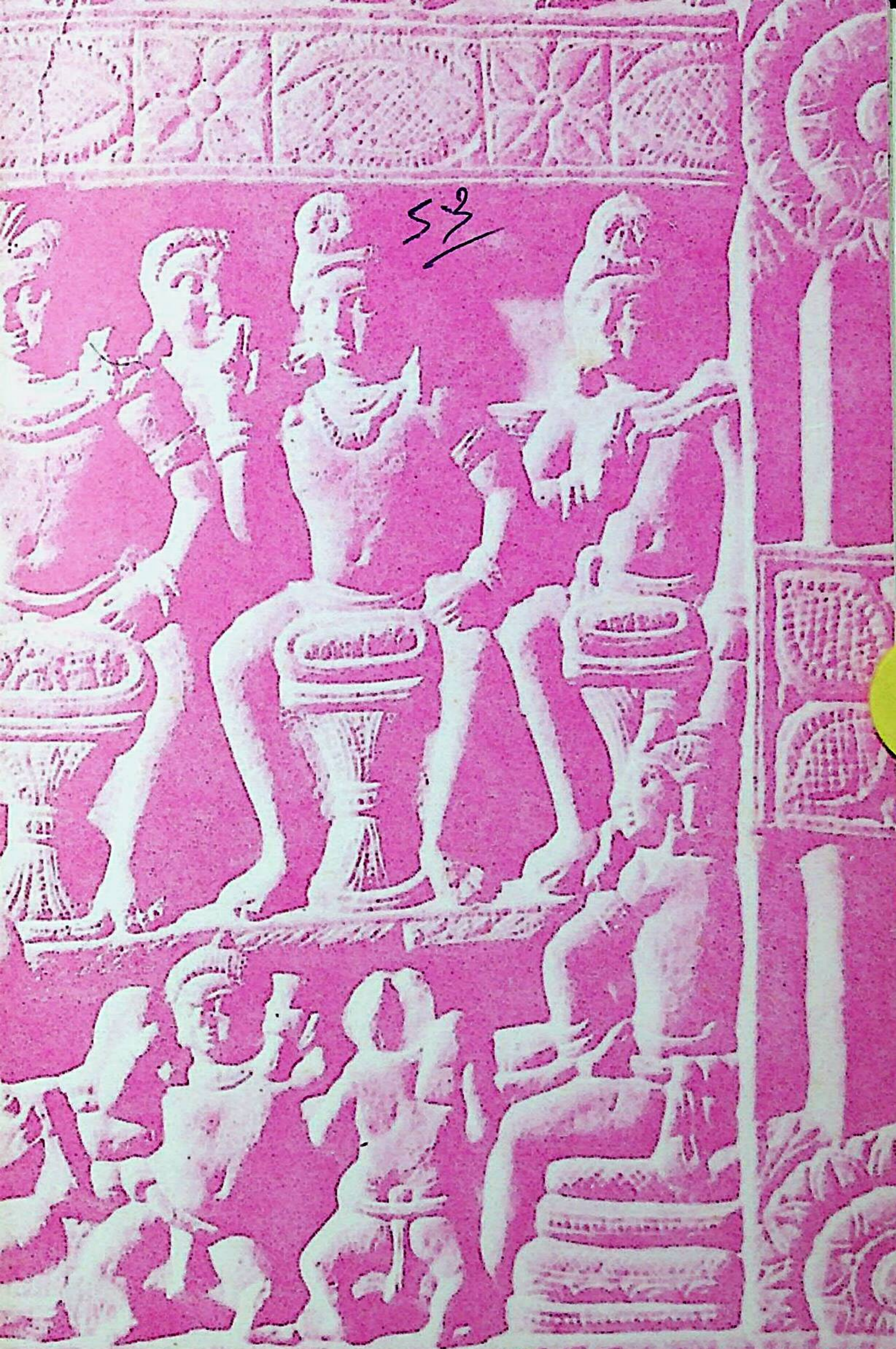
Gopalakrishna Adiga



Translated from Kannada by

Sumatheendra Nadig





Selected Poems
Gopalakrishna Adiga

The sculpture reproduced on the endpaper depicts a scene where three soothsayers are interpreting to King Suddhodana the dream of Queen Maya, mother of Lord Buddha. Below them is seated a scribe recording the interpretation. This is perhaps the earliest available pictorial record of the art of writing in India.

From : Nagarjunkonda, 2nd century A.D.
Courtesy : National Museum, New Delhi

Selected Poems
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Sahitya Akademi

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All these poets are no more and I miss them.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1986, M. Gopalakrishna Adiga became the first recipient of *Kabir Sanman,* the highest award for poetry in India, instituted by the Madhya Pradesh Government. As early as 1968 Nissim Ezekiel had written in *Poetry India* that Adiga is 'widely regarded as the greatest Indian Poet of the twentieth century.' In 1974, Gopalakrishna Adiga received the Karnataka State Sahitya Akademi Award, in 1975 the Central Sahitya Akademi Award, in 1979 the Kumaran Asan Award and in 1980 the Vardhamana Award.

Gopalakrishna Adiga was born on 18.2.1918 in Mogeri, a village near Kundapur, Karnataka. His house was about two kilometres away from the sea. Near his house there was the Shankaranarayana temple. Besides the temple a tank. All around were paddy fields. His father was a farmer, priest, astrologer and a sort of counsellor to the neighbourhood. The house resounded with the recitations of Kannada classics and discussions about them. Gopalakrishna Adiga read Kannada classics and by the age of 13 composed poems in classical metres. During his high school days he read the poetry of Bendre, Panje Mangesha Rao, Kadengodlu and others, who were the first generation Navodaya (romantic) poets. By then freedom struggle had spread to nooks and corners of Karnataka. Adiga had his middle school and high school education in Baindoor and Kundapur. He used to wear a Gandhi cap in those days. He participated in Yakshagana performances and played the role of Viswamitra. By the time he was 17, he had published poems and short stories in 'Badavara Bandhu', 'Rashtra

Bandhu' of Mangalore, and 'Subodha' and 'Kathegara' of Bangalore.

Then he studied in Yuvaraja's college Mysore, and joined B.A. Hons., course in English in Maharaja's college. In 1941 when he was 23, he was awarded 'B.M. Sri Gold medal' for his long poem 'Olatoti'. In 1942 after he passed the B.A. Hons., examination he started hunting for jobs. For two years he worked as a temporary high school teacher. He completed the Mysore civil service examination and joined the Government of Mysore. After a few months he resigned the job and became a teacher in Gandhinagar High School. At that time the progressive novelist Basavaraj Kattimani became his friend. Then he went to Tumkur to join Aryan High School as a teacher. While he stayed in Tumkur, he wrote one of his most famous lyrics, 'Mohana Murali'. He was already married in 1944. He felt tired of hopping from one high school to another. He decided to acquire the Master's degree. He was doubtful whether he could learn and earn at the same time. He resigned the job in Tumkur and went to Mysore. As his father-in-law was in Mysore, he could stay in his house for some time. He found a part-time job as a translator. In 1946 his first collection *Bhava Taranga* was published with an introduction from the charismatic poet Bendre. In 1948 his second collection *Kattuvevu Naavu* was published with an introduction from the famous poet P.T. Narasimhachar. At that time he was a lecturer in Sharada Vilas College. In 1951-52 he passed M.A. in English from Nagpur University. From 1954-1964 for 10 years he was a Reader in English at St. Philomenas College in Mysore.

In 1962 he started the historically important Journal 'Sakshi'. Then he became the Principal of Lal Bahaddur Shastri College in Sagar, about which he had high hopes of making it an ideal institution. The managing committee members started quarrelling, being divided on political party lines. When they created hurdles in running the college Adiga resigned and became the Principal of Poorna Prajna College in Udupi. By

then in 1971 the National Party, Jan Sangh, invited Adiga to contest the parliamentary seat in Bangalore against the congress stalwart Kengal Hanumanthaiah. Almost all the writers went to canvas for Adiga but Adiga lost the election. Then for six months he worked as the Deputy Director in National Book Trust, India. He was not made for that job and he got tired of the institutional politics. Next he went to Simla as a Fellow in the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies. In 1974 I got an invitation for him from Haverford College in Philadelphia and arranged his lecture tour in America. There I introduced him to the Beatnik poet Allen Ginsberg. It was a sight to see Ginsberg dressed like an Indian and Adiga in his three-piece suit. By then Ginsberg had read Adiga through my translations and he warmly welcomed Adiga. Adiga, of course, could not like the flamboyant American poet, but he was impressed by Ginsberg's power to draw huge crowds even when they had to pay to hear him. In 1982 Adiga attended the Yugoslavia World Poets' Meet. 1986, after he was paralysed, he published *Chintamaniyalli Kanda Mukha* (1987) and *Suvarna Putthali* (1990) and he had kept another collection ready *Baa Ittha Itha* which was published posthumously in 1993. The same year he also received *Pampa Prashasti* from the Government of Karnataka.

His first collection of poems *Bhava Taranga* appeared in 1946 with an introduction by D.R. Bendre. Bendre noted that Adiga had been handicapped by a ready-made style, but he also recognised the swiftness of Adiga's imagination. Adiga himself had recognised his limitation in the first poem of that collection:

> Repeating what others have written and said
> my mind is gloomy. Until I open my soul
> and with my own words can have the glory
> of expression in endless variety,
> this life is hell. (My own words)

Adiga's second collection *Kattuvevu Navu* with some changes in subject matter and outlook, responds to the progressive

movement, but his third collection *Nadedu Banda Dari* begins an attack on the poetry of the early poets, like Bendre and Kuvempu. Adiga argued that Navodaya poetry had lost touch with reality and it was full of woolly mysticism and meaningless music. He set out to give poetry a touch of reality. We already sense in these poems Adiga's modernity. The images are drawn from contemporary city life and the ironic mode examines the failures of Indian culture, society and politics. But Adiga's most significant departure from Navodaya poetry, appeared in 1952 with the publication of two long poems in free verse, *Himagiriya Kandara* and *Gondalapura*. The first poem with its heap of broken images reminds us of Eliot's *Wasteland* but the latter has no parallel in British poetry. With these poems Adiga became the acknowledged leader of the modernist movement. He did not write much criticism, but started a journal "SAKSHI" for the propagation of modern literature. Young writers like U.R. Anantha Murthy, Ramachandra Sharma, K. Sadashiva, Lankesh and Tejaswi were drawn to Adiga's poetry and Adiga's attitude to contemporary life influenced every other form of literature, like the short story, novel, drama and criticism. Adiga became 'an eye-opener for a generation'.

Adiga's second collection *Kattuvevu Navu* expressed a socialist way of thinking. When asked whether he was a socialist, he said, 'Strictly speaking I am not a socialist; I am a democrat. I believe in equality. I advocate change and social justice, and opportunity for all those who have been left behind during the course of history. They should become individuals as early as possible, so that a true democracy may be established here and a richer and more compact culture could be ensured.' Adiga wanted intellectual hierarchy. When asked if like Carlyle he believed that some men are always superior to others, and, how this would square with his democratic ideal, Adiga said, 'My concept of equality is neither physical nor intellectual. It is rather a spiritual faith in the sacredness of every living creature. This faith implies that every

individual should be respected and treated justly. It does not mean for me an all round equality which precludes a hierarchy of ability, virtue and attainment. One thing that is to be noted is that the worth of an individual does not depend upon where he is born. There are certainly superior men and women and there will be such beings in future also; but the point to remember is that they emerge from all levels of society, from the highest to the lowest.'

Adiga is a fearless poet. He would bow only to God and to no other individual:

> Lord,
> I am not one of those whose back is bent
> working the pump of flattery;
> I am not a herald who suffers
> from the mania of sycophancy.
> I am not one of those who have rheumatic backs
> having cringed like dogs for crumbs;
>
> I am not one who snuffs out his candle
> and seeks like an impotent leech, titillation through key-holes.
>
> I am not one of those who bend their backs
> for the delight of men fattened by the passage of time;
> Lord, I am not one of these. [PRAYER]

During the Emergency Adiga wrote a famous poem called 'A Comman Man':

> If you have any guts, come out
> and look at my palm; look at the unique mounts, crosses and lines.
>
> I will show you how in this broken lantern
> the sooty wick lifts up its burning head.

Looking at the poverty stricken masses Adiga says:

> The old gods having died the new god-children
> wail and toil near gutters;
> they bend and shrink in the narrow huts
> and crawl over dust, dirt, filth and spit,
> They hurry through the streets in between

cars, buses, trucks, auto-rickshaws and legs,
becoming tails of roguish ruffian comets.
These million sprouts of light
languish in the dark shadows of terrible time.
They look for left-over food, beedi and cigarette stubs
in sweepings, dungheaps and ditches.

O darlings, you beat your wings in vain in these cages;
This is not the country for you.
Procession organisers want people like you
to be their daytime torch-bearers;
they want you to be yes-men
to trail behind them and hail them
and cry victory to them.
These masters expect you to scratch your head,
bow and bend before them and cringe for a rupee;
they provide you luxurious conveyance like trucks
for you to greet the gods and goddesses
who return from the dead.

They expect you to be stone-age soldiers
to carry gunny bags of stones
to pelt at street lights and window-panes.
Your hunger has swallowed the intellect,
violence has swallowed your guts,
your throat has unknowingly gulped poison.
O God-children, where is the home for you?

We wait like the audience
for the curtain to drop in the last act.
We wait for divine light in children's eyes
to engulf and burn the poison into compost.
We wait for shoulder-high crops. [The Old Gods Having Died]

Adiga is a humanist, an environmentalist and an individualist;

The greatest achievement of the modern age
is its tribute to humanity,
the response from the inmost depth
to anything that is alive
whether animal or bird, tree or insect.
Treat them as brethern
with a sense of equality.
Love for all, that should be our aim,
to climb the cultural peak and be creative.
(I am a Hindu, I am a Brahmin)

Adiga's philosophy is the age-old philosophy of hard work which he expresses through the metaphor of farming:

> Before sunrise gird up your loins,
> get ready the bullocks with tinkling bells,
> carry the plough and yoke to the field.
> Following the ploughing sun with seven horses,
> get the land ready breaking the clods.
> Let the tongue be tied to the plough of the heart.
> Your business is to plough and sow
> and pour your heart to the earth.
> The rest may come
> from the heart of the sea,
> from the milk-filled udders of the sky,
> from the regulated desire of nature
> and from love that streams from the breasts of the earth. (Ugadi)

With such images drawn from Indian mythology and with his attack on the so-called leftist policies, some people mistook Adiga to be orthodox in his approach to contemporary life. But Adiga's conservatism is the conservatism of an intellectual who wants to preserve the best in our tradition. His liberalism is the liberalism of a rationalist who is almost iconoclastic. Adiga knows of the synthesis that Hinduism has achieved in its long history. He did not advocate crude orthodox rituals. He says, 'The Vedas being the first great literary philosophical works of our country various aspects of our culture are derived from them. Even the heterodoxies such as Jainism and Buddhism only dissent from it. The very language we use, our Kannada itself, is the resultant of the process of culture initiated by the Vedas'. Therefore when he uses traditional motives he uses them as part of his historical sense. He says:

> I am a Hindu, I am a brahmin.
> Is it a proclamation of my self-respect?
> or is it a laxative for those
> who needlessly insult me calling me a brahmin?
> Let this casteism be purged.
>
> In the old map I know, these are the lines of my longitude and
> latitude. From the north pole to the south
> If every inch is explored, these are imaginary lines.
> Why should I be proud of them?...

....
The lines of the old map are fading.
For each generation, a new map is necessary,
new longitudes and latitudes. (I Am A Hindu, I Am A Brahmin)

The Banyan, a traditional Indian symbol, for Adiga becomes a symbol of life:

Why so many hanging roots for the banyan?
In every age it gets a row of shoulders,
so gentle, so tender and itching with desire.
Every branch has little searching fingers
to dig the wind and touch the sand
in its downward learning process.

There it goes up, and there,
and here it comes down at the same time;
as it rises it descends
joining the top and the bottom.

By the time the son starts growing
the father of hanging roots warms himself up
in the sun; worn away, waiting to be reminted
he dies. (Grand-Father Planted Banyan Tree)

Though life has this kind of continuity of a banyan, Adiga worries about the present. Westernisation is seen as a force that brings about the identity crisis:

I looked for his roots
who was dressed in the European fashion;
are the roots inside or out?
Are they above or below?

Where the banyan was there
now proliferate the babool, the wild date
and shrubs. Looking at my son
now in the scorching sun
I am sorry and scared.

But Adiga believes in the sustaining forces of this culture and he sees hope in the near future:

Under the banyan tree there will be only mud,
but inside from navel to top
there lies the shadowy thousand-pillared monastery;
I wait for the miracle that brings it out.

The problem of growth is central to Adiga's poetry; growth signifies creativity. Adiga's concern for growth and a bright future is expressed as a parent's concern for the younger generation:

> On a mound, I am sitting here, on a summer day,
> under the burning sun, smoking a cigarette.
> Somewhere, down there, my son sits
> in the middle of five fires, crying.
> I keep shouting his name; alas, my son
> seems to have gone deaf. Is he really deaf?
> Or is it that he has his own language?
> My guts are twisted in anguish for him.
> During sleepless nights, his hippiedom has tumbled
> down from its own highs. I see my own reflection
> in his hapless state...
> But, the seed has no qualms for the roots;
> It springs afar and spreads its magic sails.
> For the whimsy of youth
> What shore? What limit and what purpose?
>
> Flintstones through friction
> inseminate the womb of darkness with flame;
> one waits in darkness, in solitude,
> as gratitude for the sparks of life;
> dancing to the beat of the distant sea
> to pare, press and shape
> and little by little to lose the sharpness
> of teeth and nails in realisation.
> Let the wild flame of the torch blaze
> to burn the dregs of darkness.
> Self-illumination is only possible in the ritualistic recitals
> of the Vedic way.
>
> There is the cave door and beyond that
> the great plain;
> basketful of greens and fruits;
> Growing up has no limits (Adolescence)

Adiga's poetry has always stood for maintaining a balance in our society. The shifts in his poetry are related to his basic conviction, which he has stated as follows: "I believe that we live in the midst of dualities of different levels and of different kinds. Our effort should be to achieve a sort of balance among the dualities we face. Therefore, whenever there

seems to be an overemphasis on the Leftist aspect of social thinking, I have thought it the duty of an intellectual to stress the virtue of Rightism so that a balance may be achieved. If the vices of Rightism should prevail, I should think it my duty to fight against them, set forth the virtues of Leftism so that once again a balance may be achieved. And it is only a fascist who can find fault with another individual for believing in something which he does not like. The Jansangh has as much right to exist and propagate itself and convert people, as the Socialist or the Communist Party. In a democracy, idealogies should be fought strictly on the level of intelligent arguments and with the noble motive of arriving at the truth or a consensus for the good of the people and the country."

Adiga's poetry is difficult. Reading it in English translation is much more difficult. In 1973 Allen Ginsberg wrote to me : "Adiga's poems show mobility of mind and modernity of means__they look as live and mentally aware as any contemporary Indian poetry in translation I've read__and that is not a great deal that I've read__ Translations (yours) seem O.K.__ sitting at desk reading I realised myself definitely as a westerner reading text with precise local Indian reference-mind-touchstones and felt a little left out, fatigued–the problem of knowing enough about east and west never seems to be solved for me__I sort of gave up trying to (track back)__ understand precisely so precise a set of references__but I kept being reminded by the swiftness and sexual honesty of the imagery of the fresh mind of the poet and yourself appreciating his text. I'm glad you had the patience to feed me the poems."

Adiga is difficult because he uses multiple compound metaphors which rush in the swiftness of his imagination. His symbols carry 'indirection,' 'instress' and 'inscape', 'felt-thought', and 'precisely so precise a set of references' 'auditory imagination', a vast geographical area, and his diction combines

Kannada, Sanskrit, English, Hindi and Urdu words, words from the local dialect, vedic and puranik lore. With a few poems included in this book I have tried to show only the coastline of Adiga's poetry.

His constant preoccupation for nearly twenty years was his concern for the development of the country. He felt that the leftist leaning of the country and the empty promises by the leaders were detrimental to the growth of the country. Therefore he wrote more political poems than any other poet in Kannada—not all of them are good—but the basic concern for the welfare of mankind produced his best poems like 'The Song of Earth' 'Adolescence' 'Past' 'On The Day Of Sri Rama's Birth', 'The Grand-Father Planted Banyan Tree', 'The Frog In The Well', 'The Face Seen In Chintamani', 'Rebellion', 'To Ambedkar Bhima Rao' etc. Poets can learn from Adiga hitherto unknown strategies of poetic expression for their raid on the inarticulate. In him great poetry and great craftsmanship go together.

Sumatheendra Nadig

16 Sep 2005
Bangalore- 560085

1. My Own Words

Carrier of fragrance from varied flowers;
O breeze, you don't get the essence of their smells.
O milky way, although you become
an illuminated lake imprisoning stars
You don't possess the light that illumines life.
O evening cloud, you change your colours and shine
But you don't possess your own unique colour.

When will this earth who shines with borrowed lights
from sun and moon have her own luminosity?
O quarters, who steal other's words and echo them
When will you have your own speech?

Repeating what others have written and said
My mind is gloomy. Until I open my soul
and with my own words can have the glory
of expression in endless variety, this life is hell.

1940

2. Kali In Calcutta

Recently Kali came to receive the offering:
Human-animals after killing human-animals
danced and screamed in triumph;
They pierced and thrashed, they burnt and skinned
alive not only children, women and men, but also
the poor, the helpless and orphans. Looking at
the streets crowded with corpses
vultures circled and attended the dinner.
Awestruck by this violence, street dogs
stood stupified; the assembly of crows
unanimously agreed: 'yes, certainly man is
The crown of creation!'

Dogs, crows and vultures wondered
why Man does not eat what he kills.
'Man is selfless, He kills for us', they
thought; and each one by lifting its tail
spreading its wings sang in
unision about the victory of Man.
Jesus and Buddha were pleased to
realise that their incarnations had
fulfilled their missions; our Gandhiji
felt contended that year by year
his penance had yielded the fruit.
There loomed a message in blood:
This is a sign of incarnation.
Now mankind will be delivered forever.

(c) 1946

3. The Enchanting Flute

What enchanting flute called you to the far-off shore?
What beautiful garden tempted your earthly eyes?

Soft bed and the Moon and sandal paste, embraces and kisses;
The wild dance of the senses in the garden of desire.

Weren't you pleased with voluptuous breasts and the warm
breathing-cage of flesh and blood? Why are you listless now?

What is the suggestion of your rolling eye and floating glance?
Is it a pleasant sorrow or a plea for grace?

Like fire hidden in wood, dejection reclines somewhere,
when something rubs or grazes perplexity catches fire.

Beyond the seven seas somewhere waits the hidden sea;
should the silent murmer of unsprouted waves come here
today?

Your soul went into a rapture, your energy became ecstatic;
Is life a matter of leaving what is, and pining for what is not?

What enchanting flute called you all of a sudden?
What beautiful garden stretched towards you its lightning-hand?

(c) 1947

4. We Will Build

We will build a new country
It will be a land of plenty.

Before our hot blood grows cold,
Before the magic of youth fades away,
Before this tumultous sea of sky-high waves dries up,
we will build a new country!

The dreams of our hearts will become the wish-fullfilling cow,
And they will milk what we desire;
The milking hands will be blessed by visions,
And our unfailing aims will back us up!

There may be trenches of castes and creeds
Around the forts and bastions
Of the Rakshasa of custom; he may challenge us
To wage a war with him!

Are we going to shirk? We are brave youths!
In a single leap we will cross the trenches,
We will smash the forts, and under our feet
We will have the enemy and break his bones!

To climb the fort-wall let our bodies be the steps
Let our pain and death be the cradle of the new country;
Our hearts do not tremble in fear;
We are brave ones, we never think of failure!

There may be seas of troubles, we will cross them;
We will enter into the blazing mouth of despair
And come out victorious; clearing all our confusions
and differences we will build the new country!

The stomach has become the centre of our life;
In the fire of unjust greed for food,
human culture, love and yearning for the divine
Are burnt away!

Keeping all that is available to the whole of mankind,
Sharing equally our joys and sorrows,
Our new country will come sailing
on the waves of our friendship!

Here, in this place, just in front of us
On the hoods of sorrow, on the thighs of failure,
Our country is going to blossom.
Wait and see, its sweet fragrance will spring up
And fill our hearts!

Enthusiasm, excitement and passionate youths
Will be the flag of this country;
It will flutter all over the sky;
We will see to it that nobody will obstruct it!

Come along, all those who are ready to push us back,
Come along, all those who are ready to beat us;
And those who speak ill of us, and those who wish us ill!
Accept the challenge:
We will finish all of you and on your sepulchres
We will build a new land, a land of plenty!

(c) 1947

5. Today Our Land (An Excerpt)

Section - 3

Lift up this tree of dead roots
With all the branches and twigs;
Prepare coffee with dry leaves, drink it
As sorrow chokes your throat.

Prepare a basin round it and water it.
If grief swells up, let your tears
fill here ; inside let satan's food
be cooked, very delicious food.

Beautify the tree with bulbs. Let the lights swing
a rainbow on every branch;
put paper flowers and garlands
and perfume. Let the bees hum and drum.

Don't blame
The tree as shadowless, the branches as hollow;
How is shadow better than gold-covering?
This is age-old tree. For hanging oneself
Is anything better than its branches?

If the western breeze blows
The tree dances, and echoes it;
what an imitation dance!
Our divine tree doesn't like the dirty water of this soil;
It drinks the elixir of dreams.

Today Our Land (An Excerpt)

Does no bird come here? parrot, parakeet
cuckoo, sparrow, crow or owl?
Kill the cuckoos, stuff them
and keep them in a row on the branches.

Cover the worm-eaten bark with goldsheet
And over it inscribe the history of this tree;
"Once it gave shade, green leaves, sprouts, flowers and fruits.
It had the cuckoo's song, and it was a home of parrots!

It carried the bow of Rama. Here was heard
Krishna's conch, and here his wheel was turning;
Holy men's wand, vessel and grass-mat were here,
Their leaf-huts beautified this place."

Plant here the flag of 'What was', my child,
'What is' shouldn't wring your heart.
The tree is there, covered with gold.
The basin is there, water it!

(c) 1950

6. Be Doing Something, Brother

Be doing something, brother, something, anything,
You must not simply be;
pull out this plant; nip that little-sprout.
If you find a flower, crush it;
Wherever there is grass,
Burn it with your flaming torch.
Butterflies, parrots, sparrows, wherever, whenever you find them,
Stalk them, catch them, pluck their wings, fur and feather ;
Where the wild elephant has run amuck
The jasmine sobs here, and the golden banana cries there.

All around on your walls push-buttons parade potency;
Close your eyes, and press a dozen; the earth, water
And the sky are all your geese that lay golden eggs.
Cut and rip them open,
'Do or die' is the motto.
For the amazing dance of your genius on all fours
Disaster a minute is the test, brother.
Do something, act, act quick.
Who knows, may be, while making a monkey,
You may end up making the god Vinayak.
Winnowing to separate the chaff from grain,
Weighing each thing in introspection___
that is part of the dead past,
Part of ghostly inheritance; isn't it borther?

There is the forest ; cut it.
Clean the stump, slash it to make
Arches of Triumph ;
You have the axe, the sickle, the saw and the knife, don't you?
Brandish them.
When the dust settles all around,
When a thin wall of mist shoots up between faces,
When the road forks out before your eyes and sighs,
When two mountain peaks raise their heads and jostle,
When enchantresses wink from every tree top,
Should you worry?
Should you be conscience-stricken?
Shame on you, draw out your arrow
of which you are proud.
Blinkers are your forte, my borther;
Whatever you come across, eat it;
Whatever your eye catches, squeeze it;
Whatever entangles you, slash it.

This helpless
'Mother Earth' lies here exhausted; her eyes
Are fixed to the skies.
Until the last drop of blood is there
Push your teeth into her limbs and suck.
Isn't there enough flesh?
Atleast don't you find her bones, nerves and marrow?
Ah, that's it!
That's manly! That's brave!

Yonder lies the well of life,
Drain its water to the last drop.
Let the dredger thoroughly search the bottom.
Break the atom and achieve your greatness.
Set it against the cosmos itself.
May you succeed!

Be doing something brother,
Don't be idle and don't be a dead weight upon this earth.
To reduce the earth's burden
Your action would be most needed, most natural.

April 1953

7. Ugadi

(The beginning of the New Year)

I

On one of the beams of the deserted house
on old owl,
(snoring day in and out, grumbling wretch.)
Even if light sprouts
        and blood pours in the East,
even if early morning passion
        sings in the pulses of plants,
even after daybreak
        the hooting does not break.
The old owl bothers us.

The wind feels a heaviness;
        so also flowers, sprouts and buds.
Saplings of paddy, jowar, Ragi and Wheat,
just opening their eyes are restless;
Playful clouds are dumbstruck.
Fish are stuck in the mud;
steam boats that puff out smoke,
trains, buses and even bullock-carts
and engines in factories,
the crawling, smiling, little star in the courtyard—
all are suffocated;
Once an hour, the owl hoots and then keeps mum.
Someone asleep gets up and lies down again;
on text books in schools falls the owl's shadow—
Its hooting hits Rameshwara in the South
and the Himalayas in the North.

Let the eyes of the owl be blown up;
drive out this bad omen beyond the house premises,
beyond the cultivated land, beyond the open field,
beyond the groves, towns and the earth itself.

II

After a dip in the pond, come back home,
with two lotuses in hand;
(If you have a tuft, stick it in).
Eat neem leaf and jaggery (you have it?).
(Doesn't matter even if you drink tea),
Sit down for a while and listen to your calendar.

Now the golden light is out; even over smoky mills;
Omnibuses are crowded with passengers;
Like ants, the workers are at the factory gate;
the young-smile goes to school carrying its bag.
Even the sun seems to be flamboyant;
He smiles when a cloud pokes into his face.
And here people are dashing forth like arrows
to a noble rich garden of life, where wells are
full of water. And there is an abundance
of coconut, mango, pomagranate and lemon;
the fields grow in plenty, grams and pulses.
The sky is filled with cows in heat;
the old house is whitewashed and painted;
Each house has a clean front
decorated with *Rangavalli*.
From the house comes the aroma of fragrant frankincense.
Cobwebs removed from corners,
The windows are wide open.
Granaries are full of giggling corn;
the yard is filled with fowls, sparrows, crows,
and boisterous children.

Let the inflated balloons yellow, blue and green—
touch the sky; let them hang
from coconut flowers;

Let them swing over ears of corn,
and swim in the water-filled clouds;
Let them rest in the cradle of stars;
Let the chariot of enthusiasm
Come to the earth
after enjoying roaming in the sky;
Let there be jubilation
in the worship of Gods, with coconuts and camphor.

III

The new year has come stepping over winter;
take to the road
and wash the street with your sweat.
Cease now from pleasure.
Begin a new sentence and keep the freshness till the end
of the book.
Before sunrise, gird up your loins.
Get ready the bullocks with tinkling bells round their necks.
Carry the plough and yoke to the field;
Following the ploughing sun with seven horses;
Get the land ready breaking the clods.
Let the seeds dry in the sun.
Don't be restless, there is a lot more to be done.
Keep your mouth shut,
and let the tongue be tied to the plough of the heart;
your business is to plough and sow
And pour your heart to the earth.
The rest may come clamouring from the heart of the sea;
it may come from the milk-filled udders of the sky;
and from desire regulated by nature,
and from love that streams from the breasts of the Earth.

March 1953

8. Deepavali

What a fellow!
Shutting windows and doors
he shrinks into darkness;
Smoke chokes his lungs.
Bats and rats shriek into smiles,
outside, the happy excited elephant's trumpet call:

Get up, grope, search for the latch.
Put your hand on the latch:
Come out, you live coal-speech-spark,
leaving the silent-ash of the cemetery.
Come, you calf, released from the halter,
push your mouth at the udder;
Ah! the milk oozes; the grass is green.
Look 'an elephant has come' at the fort-gate.

Where is the key?
Summon up the time in the garden, go back twenty and six years,
There is the sand-house to play;
clustered trees and creepers all around;

Under the gauva tree stir up the pollen dust, search and peer.
Is he who searches and brings it back a hero? Is that bravado?
Where is your longing for Alladin's rusty lamp?
"What is your command, master? Pray, what can I do?

II

Fireworks of 'Flower pots', and 'Flower-arrows'.
In the oblivion memory flashes,
The plough-share of happiness hurries and whirrs,

The gleaming face of innocence
is a drop of bliss.
Circles of shadows of darkness whirl arround.
In the island of ten coconut trees
the sun stands still, for a moment.
The ship of light ploughs the sea of darkness,
and moves on to distant waters.
crackers explode in every house, into a million grotesque shapes.
The uproar bodies forth,
an unwelcome groom to the bride of cemetery-silence.

Is light mere distortion of darkness?
Is this festival of light a feast for twelve month's of darkness?

III

Day after day, the besieging of his fort goes on,
but he keeps the door ever closed.
While waves of lamplight laugh in the streets,
Within his room only the darkness speaks.
Why persist, dear fellow, frame this happy moment
and hang it on the wall right before your eyes.
Throw the doors wide open, and welcome 'Deepavali',
and let the happy excited elephant of light
Saunter in, swaying its massive trunk.
Listening to the light's trumpet call
Sweep the dust inside and the spider-webs.

Life's tip crackles in the cemetery just for a moment.
Your sand-house under the guava tree lasts only for a moment.
Know for sure, your dark-room will not disappear.

Oct 1953

9. Song Of The Earth

My birth was at the bottom rung of the Western Ghats
at a distance of only three rolls from the boiling
cauldron sea.
She beckoned me waving large wide coconut leaves,
She shook the rattle of arecanut bunch.
In the sugarcane press she sat at the teeth and made
me drink the ceaseless flow of affection.
In the paddy, wheat and maize fields with fleshy songs she fed,
On the fragrant peaks of Jasmin, *gorate* and *Mandara*
She lulled me to sleep.
She sieved me with the sweet sounds that flowed
from the throats of birds and bees.
To the cosmic element of the sky
She added her own spark of life.

* * * *

Under every tree in the underwood the thickly fallen
Dhoopanut sprouts, shreiks and cries;
Wherever the rain-wand has touched the ups and
downs there are sprouts, saplings and grass;
The intoxicating rainbow like *gorate* flirts and giggles;
The bee with tinkling anklets lifts the cup of
Nandabattalu to its lips.
From the backyard, I, the pearl diver, dived down
and deeper still;
The green waves swashed and foamed; there were
winds and thunder;

Blinded by the maddening colourful pearls at the bottom
I dallied till the evening;
Though I pulled out the winebag sticking to my lips,
my fancy searched its spring.

* * * *

On the fence, at the edge of the field, on every inch
of the grove
There are maternity homes, pain, anxiety and laughter;
the log sprouts — what beauty, what shrieks and cries!
Nurses and Doctors move in and out —
four persons always follow them;
In the cradle-shop the bamboo is cheap;
The priest who sanctifies children's names knows better the
funeral rites;
Packs and packs of worms crawl down to the earth
from the slimy bark,
Flap their wings in the vacuum, clap and dance in the gutters;
Under the scorching sun leech-like worms dwell on
decaying carrions.

* * * *

Oh! what a thirst at the dawn for light.
In the dark waters of the Yamuna shines a stone on
the hood of the dark serpent;
Doors, windows, houses, towns and forests looked in wonder,
The child-like camera-eye clicked from every angle.
In the darkness-driven room reel after reel was shown on
muslin curtain.
In the ins and outs of the estuary played a chain of waves;
Pearl, gold, emerald, amethyst, red and yellow;
Wherever I fell I was in a coupling;
Lips had the itch and thirst for an ocean;
I opened my eyes and listened to many colours,

My ears were full of green, white, yellow and red.
The cat with ghee-smeared forehead was turning like
a top with its tail in the air;

She hugged me more than a mother;
She suffered me repeatedly in her womb;
She throttled the throats of birds to sing for me;
She cut the throats of saplings to feed me.
This Dhritarastra-love cursed this Bheema;
Nowhere was Krishna's grace.

My feet have roots in her, vainly I hitched my wagon
to the stars.
Like a spineless coward, I explored the endless path
in the bathroom of my mind.

I am stricken with the secret sin of Oedipus.
I rode a tractor, ploughed and thrashed,
I sowed and grew seeds of atom bombs.
Deadly, bacteria was all my joy.

They call me on and on, those heavenly birds
With sixty invitations to the court of wind;
They whisper in my ears, haunt me again and again.
This magician's scheming was ineffectual; I got angry with
myself,
I dashed my head against the walls and shrieked.
I pecked out my feathers and piled them up on the
dinner plate.

* * * *

The colt neighed and danced, all round was grass and gram.
With the bridle of gold and golden rein,
With a crown of colourful quills over the head,

harnessed to a coach it danced till its ribs were broken.
And then
'The body is heavy, the mind is heavier'
'How can the bride go to her in-laws?
Only the God of Tirupati should help her'
'Those who pay for ale will all go to heaven'
Study of veda, shastra, purana, prayer and worship;
When the stock of oil is over
She makes a wick before a broken lamp;
Even then this Mother won't leave me, she raises the
smoke of chillies and scratches the shell for its kernel.
When I am carried on a bier, she can't come out;
She gives birth to another child.

* * * *

In the lac-magic-house of Mother earth
memory of Hastinapura was not kindled.
Whether it was constructed by Maya or Suyodhana
I need not doubt till I scratch a match.
I enjoyed myself there : I skated on the slippery floor
from the front yard to the inner darkness.

"Who goes there? My Mother?"
"Mother? What is this madness? You stupid fellow"
"Are you a fury or fire, pray what can I do?"
"If you are manly, kill me, can you?"
Who pushed me in to her gutter-womb?
Karna was carried by the waters; Radha became his
foster mother;

Kunti comes only to kill.
Her whole body is a maternity home and cemetery;
She is satisfied with herself.

Tiger, Cheetah, Elephant, Ox, Ram, Mule, Donkey,
Mango 'Nerile', Jack-tree, Jaaji and 'Jaali'
These are her natural offsprings.

Why did the demon of incestuous thirst rise in her
the moment I came in?

They have left me blindfolded in the forest;
They have raised a fence of barbed wire;
They serve me salt water to drink and live coal to eat;
They chain my leg and expect me to dance.

When I arrived, came six friends to greet me.
The candle burns, all around is melted wax,
Finally the wick will be cinders.

Mother Earth is only a step mother.
She is Suruchi to Uttanapada
The forest is the only direction left for Dhruva,
Aranyakas showed the path.

Take away all the colourful clothes you offered,
Take this coat, this shirt and this pyjama
Even this ruined cottage is yours; Take it away.
Unless I give away everything
there is no other way for me.
Otherwise how can I hold my head high
and walk shoulder to shoulder with my equals?
Isn't it only by giving up the god-given armour and sword
I can bare the nectar-pot in my heart?

* * * *

Viswamitra said: 'Trishanku, move towards heaven'
He hung in mid air like a bat.
It is as difficult to take out your feet from slough
As the struggle that goes on in the sky-cage of
golden wires.

Mire is dirty; as soon as one is born there
is the bier of the uterine fluid.
If it were all earth, a toy of mud, that would have
been something.
But even in this toy, there is a mechanism of breathing;
Beyond this mechanism there is the conspiracy
of mysterious light.
The path of air has no footprints.

Look here, this is difficult;
What does anyone lose if dust goes to dust
Wind to wind, fire to fire,
Water to water and the element of sky to the sky?
Something remains_
an electric wire_
News from beyond the stars and nebulae,
Weird shapes coming from the nether world;
And a trick that mixes and plays them.

Some say they don't know where the switch is,
some say they have forgotten the head office address.
The remaining say it is somewhere here.

In the dark narrow blind alley
We have to move groping along the walls;
The blind on the shoulders of the lame;
We have to watch out how we progress.

Aug 1954

10. Vulture (Excerpts)

1

Look
Look up
a vulture!
Beneath the rip-rap sound of settling wings
a bubble-like chicken of this earth
is crushed like an ant
by a bubble of the sky.

With only one co-co-rico
stopped this tap;
the screech was sharp enough to pierce your heart;
the silent noon-day balloon went to thousand scraps.
Now, what do you find here? Emptiness:
Under the chequered shade of the coconut tree
the scorching sunlight has thrown its dice;
In the loom of the breezy wind
the scorching sun has woven the pall for hundreds.
The dead orange-coloured-naked-leaf
is wiping away the day-light murder.
The railroad where a train had passed
Sways drunk with silence.
Now nobody can read any more the name of Beria
in the Russian Encyclopedia,
But the Behring Strait which swallowed up a vulture
still can be seen in the index.

2

Half a minute ago, the chick was there, dancing ;
not knowing that the hard earth might give way
and there may be slough in its place.
Even though the wind has swept and washed
doesn't it resound in the cave, its innocent babble?

Between being and non-being
flows the stream of sympathy :
While the wound was still alive it was blooming inside,
a beautiful pearl.
Around the naked cry for the death of krouncha birds,
the Ramayana verse became the silken skin.

This was a sprightly chick;
Only a few days ago it was hatched;
When the wings grew strong
It had crossed the threshold.
Around the stick in the dung heap of the limited and
Unlimited time it had performed a windtower dance.
Feeling elated with the fresh wind outside
it had leaped like the best horse and touched the
boundary line.
In the golden light of the Sun it had sailed as on a life-buoy
and had moved within and without like the weaver's spindle.

In the dance-circle around the manure-pit it had played
the chameleon dance.
To make the dance sweeter, had scratched the earth and
had a worm for breakfast.
Just a few seconds ago !
But now it is nowhere to be seen.
That in the huge tree of many branches a branch broke
down is a trifle;
A sand particle on the sea-shore was carried away
by the wind.

Even without crossing his limit this innocent fellow fell
into the limit of the sky :
When he was about to swallow the earthworm in the
forceps-grasp of his beak he was swallowed straight away.

3

The Moon and the Stars in Concentric circles move
One within the other in an order.
It is a world of limits.
Well-oiled wheel progeny
roll on effortlessly on metalled roads.
Within the limits of one life
there are limits for hundreds;
Under the boots cockroaches, moths, white ants and scorpions.
None has the right to cross his limit
and to commit aggression on another's border.
Even the arrow has to follow a line.
The sword, the bomb, sharp edges of tooth and nail,
have to keep watch on their border.
Beyond the limits of the expansive waters
there are other limits, in hundreds.

4

This is a gigantic spider's web.
At the centre of the silk-soft multi-walled fort
While he meditates,
a fly enters his mouth at this side
and at the other side, from the navel
Comes out in the form of a gossamer thread.

Starting from his head office up to the boundary,
he partols
with the usual style of a soldier with a rifle
talking shop.
He has no fear of attack,

But has only the grace of welcoming!
keeping the door open
somewhere within he seems to play patience hypocritically.
But he knows the technique of finishing his prey
the moment a fly touches his line.
This is an age-old story.

5

Around the rotting vulture on the dungheap
The sprightly chicken goes gay;
While the chicken dangles from the vulture's beak in the sky
There wriggles a part of the worm on the earth.

Around my living room roar the waves of fear,
And hundreds of smiling sails are spread;
In the aquarium of the ocean
The fish dance forgetting their limit.

1956

11. Prayer

Lord,
I am not one of those whose back is bent
working the pump of flattery;
I am not a herald who suffers
from the inania of sycophancy.
Not one of those who have rheumatic backs
Having cringed like dogs for crumbs;

I am not one who snuffs out his candle
And seeks like a leech, titillation through key-holes.
I am not one of those cowards who bend their backs
for the delight of men, fattened by the passage of time;
Lord, I am not one of these.

Holding my little torch to the sun's face
I imagine and beam that I have caused the day-break;
This fatty, paunchy who can not bend, I grin within myself;
a fattened rooster with cultivated strut;
O Lord, cure me of this dropsical bulge.

Destroy this strange harvest of stale belches
Each irrigating a blighted poem;
Bless us Father, that all that is eaten
is properly assimilated into the blood-stream.

Let not raw, undigested junk food
Be vomited on to pieces of paper;
Arrange for natural outlets;
Let everyone have a free conduct to one's private self.

Most importantly,
Teach the hygiene of mastication,
The way of chewing a morsel two and thirty times
And digesting it in the saliva stream.
Even if you do not teach it,
Let it not be forgotten
That it has not been learned.
Destroy the illusion that eating onions
Will sweeten one's breath.
Prick the balloon of inflated words
with the pin of actuality.

Arrest the automated day-dreams
That open the sluice gates
To giant thighs, which play hide and seek
To the embrace;
Do not rouse the ego to masturbate
When fantasy fairies streak naked
In the open air;

And in your infinite mercy
Send real women, with real thighs,
And unwrinkled skins
That can vibrate the soul,
And turn it on.

Do not send ghostly guerilla hordes
To ambush me, every time I venture out and in.
Let the guests come home full-blooded,
And let the skinless spectres
Be banished from my guest-list.

Let every ship reach its haven. Let it not
Be swallowed by whale-like thighs
And be made to rot.
Let import and export go on for ever;
Especially, save the sane sexuality of the East,
Protecting it from the infection of the European pox.

The torch wavers in the wind. Even an electric lamp
Is vulnerable to a blow.
Your mountain of vapours condenses into semen
And digs into the thighs of the Earth;
And, in its arrogance spills itself everywhere.
The orgasmic ecstacy
Thrills thorn as well as grass.
For a moment's fructified desire,
It takes months, years, and centuries
Of abstinence, perversion and equal satisfaction.
Father,
Teach us to work the miracle
Of nine months' gestation and delivery.

Teach us not to bend and to bend.
Teach the creative flame to challenge
The cheek of dawn, and yet,
Sustain itself against the tossing wind.
Teach us how not to become a tamed horse,
But to be a proud, wild one.

Similarly,
Let the capacity to bear the weight of the world
on our thighs
Settle into a habit.
Teach us to be like you, supreme in solitude,
ecstatic in super-consciousness,
And to ejaculate bewteen deserving thighs.

Lord,
This is half-hatched awareness,
Let the full-bodied son of 'Vinata' break out of the shell.
He stands stiff like a silver staff
to churn the wind;
But under the weight of your thighs
Becomes cushion-soft and flexible.

June 1957

12. Past

1

They haunt me, the mysterious foetuses of the past;
The stale air of the sunken old well
rises on all fours crawling upside down
entwining the sunbeam that sings a lullaby
and charges towards the basil bush.

The stalk-detached navel-cord and
the severed rat's tail quiver.
As I grope peering in the darkness
suddenly flashes a line of golden ore
And a wing-burnt star which is struggling
in the dark moats of the new moon.

2

Today's newspapers are full with the news of the past.
One part above water and seven underneath,
the iceberg becomes all at once a fiery word-erupting
snow-covered innocent volcano.
Though the papers are closed,
noiseless empty skeletons gather in the room,
with feet turned back strain, making dumb signs.
In the standing waters of the sky
spermatozoa rush to seek their goals.
Behind the curtain of the darkened stage
shining words wait for their clues.
Do they not desire the outside air surrounding the
colourful plants?

3

Shelterless forefathers wander in the wind
without knowing where to incarnate.
I know the chants to drive away the ghosts,
but I forgot the chants which could make them divine.
In vain I wave the magic wand.
We trusted the purohits, and turned to the west.
Atleast now we must delve deep into our ancient lore.

At the time of digging, the soil is foetus form.
Deeper and deeper thrust of the pickaxe
might show us the shining golden ore.
Excavating it, smelting and purifying it,
atleast now we must learn
to shape them into the images of our personal Gods.

4

The decaying water inside the well, goes up as vapour;
the sky becomes its field of action.
The unseen drop
In the dark womb of the clouds
is like the foetus form that waits for nine months.
For the pastness of vapour rain is the present form.

Prepare the fields for paddy and grains;
Turn them into beautiful gardens;
Temple towers will have golden peaks.

May 1958

13. Nehru Will Not Retire

1

Nehru will not retire,
Thank God!
Now the wind may blow as usual
And the clouds may rain;
The cock may sing its co-co-rico,
Mica, which is called crow-gold, taking the place of gold,
long winding words might link up
ladder-like and sniff
the treasures of Alakaavati, the treasury of Gods.
Milk might flow in the form of speech
And level up all the ups and downs;
The leveller-intellect may level down the country with a shout
From Kashmir to Kanyakumari!

2

No, No, Nehru will not retire,
let no parasite doubt it!
Riding two boats
he is eager to take the third step
for which there is no place at all.
On the mirror-like streak of summer stream
his laughter jumps over wind and rain.
Even if his sky-measuring foot does not touch the ground

His business is to trample the 'demon-king'.
At the estuary standing astraddle on the whirling boats
he streches his long hand to reach the fruit of the sky.
Is there a dark sea beyond the estuary?
'Nonsense'! he says,
'How beautiful is the evening sky'!

3

This daring hero is not afraid of the epilogue;
This ever-green hero will not quit the stage
Even after the curtain drops.
He goes round the world carrying the
Globe on his shoulders
And speaks a soliloquy which seems to be
hours long and miles long.
In the eyes of the audience
he wipes his sweat, groans, and breathes like a bellow
and smiles even as he carries the heavy burden.
For each clap, he shows a new trick;
Because of him the theatre is full.
Otherwise next minute the company will go bankrupt.
You shareholders, who know this quite well,
listen attentively;

No, No, Nehru will not retire;
There is no doubt about the ten percent dividend!

May 1958

14. The Frog in the Well

1

Where are you now, you who walked shoulder to
shoulder with me
And favoured the sails with your breath,
Who got me visas to distant capitals and dream islands,
My friend who gave me the slip, where are you now?

Just half-way down inside the belching-grove
On the brimful-bank of the cool lake
you tripped me, and, before I could blink, the fool,
you made a beeline for the blue.

Heavy-bodied, I lie here like an orphan.
Flower, plant, creeper, tree, bush and nest
Make faces and giggle at me;
All around, the hunters keep a mocking vigil.

The lame jack tree stands with its yellowed leaves,
High with brewed sunlight;
The banana tree bending with fruits
Rots in the stem, transfusing the surrounding
shoots with its sap.

The rain clouds have stopped their loitering; corn is ripe;
Streams, wells and springs are full of algae.
The wind that turns the windmill with its bruised neck,
Groans that this is the end of the race.

Exhaustion through deliveries is my only
gain for my faith in you.
Shoud I be like a well whose springs are dried?
Awaken with your magic touch the suffocated, seething springs,
And bring them back to life.

I go back in time, I desire to be
Rolled up in your magic blanket;
Wrapped up, I slide down the slope
To the beckoning sea, like a live fountain.

2

Then, I used to be promptly present every dawn
at the edge of the shore, like fear on tiptoe;
As the golden spire of sun's chariot
entered the foaming sea, there came

A tiny boat with a tiny sail and
You rowed toward me speedily;
when the boat touched the beach
in a flash, bending, you hauled me in.

We sailed the seven seas through high and low tides;
We gasped for breath but rowed through out the day.
The tired boat was weighed down with loads of rainbows
And gems when the land received it.

On the island house in the dark ocean
We played a naked game throughout the night;
So many wholesome eggs were laid by you and me.
Every single one had only your insignia and seal.

Every minute was a great fair; my hands pulled
the juggernaut;
And I shouted the slogans-of your glory.
Our providential union was the source of power
For the voice and muscles of millions.

Nevertheless, you are a schemer, I know...
When the teacher had stepped out, you the *Bhagavatha*
Clashed cymbals and sang,
And I became the awesome Bheema
and grabbing a ruler for a club

I wielded it like a mace, shouting a war-cry;
By the time I had flashed it around twenty times
The vase was broken; my classmates roared with laughter;
The bruises on my back have become an unhealing story.

Then we sat on either side of a see-saw
It was always lighter at your end;
However, now and then you allowed it to be balanced,
And I didn't feel I was unbearably heavy.

3

Now the time has come for the fruit to fall and rot;
For the termites to attack the green stems;
For the planks of the juggernaut to be wormeaten
and its rope to wear out;
And for the dampness to dry.

My weight grows day by day; my end of the see-saw
Licks the dust, and there
The end you ride touches the sky;
Cataracted I don't see your countenance.

Your voice is heard like a hundred waterfalls;
Where I sit, a hundred roots start peeping out.
When the sprouts contact the air, they dry up
Without your life-giving juices quickening them.

4

I am Mr. Frog now, who has tasted the waters of
seven ponds,
And hopping is my fate and life-style.
From the earth into the water and back again to the earth,
My duty is to hop between the realms.

Bloated, I gasped and wriggled on the earth;
Now I must get down to the bottom.
I will hide, buried in the smooth womb of mud.
Bloated, beyond limits, slimming is my only goal.

The air-light golden body springs up
From the clear water of the pond and plunges down;
When I lie down on the green grass of the bank
the sun will caress me while I sing.

If I eat the flies, will the garden be fertile?
Will the banana plant get rejuvenated?
If I drown, will the coconut feel lost?
Will the jack tree feel weary?
Even to know this I spent a lot of time!

The jasmine announces your smile,
the mango gives the shade of your love,
the mud at the bottom of the pond
shows your love by its embrace:
To play here is my fresh resolve.

Dec 1963

15. Here They Come

Sticking beard and moustache,
wearing a cap,
Putting on dhoti or pyjama or shirvani or surval;
masked like Rishis
trim
haughty, flaunting
walking on stilts to look tall
with microphone in throat
carrying sign boards
as minister, legislator, expert and leader of the people
they come
to every town.
And looking at this army
I feel like laughing.

2

They come,
the surveyors.
Beware! Beware!
with pickaxe, shovel, scythe and rod,
in groups.
They come from Delhi to villages.
From there to here
they come, the surveyors come
Beware! Beware!
To remove the boundary stone

and to fix it between you and me;
pulling down walls and bringing down huts
to the ground level;
by removing dhoti and saree to make you and me naked,
to fasten a belt round our necks
and to lead us by chains;
to remove our individual facial marks
in the name of Common Man,
to break our skulls and insert microphones—

They come
the surveyors,
sticking beards,
challenging, down the mountain carrying guns,
They unload themselves from jeeps;
they are all eighteen years old
but wear the skins of people in their sixties,
They come—

My laughter stuck in my throat
I stand there blinking
like an idiot who has stepped into the kindgom of adolescents;
I was a fool to tell the truth for which I was a witness.

3

These new incarnations:
who stole the Vedas and gave it to Somaka;
the tortoises who carry the earth on their backs,
who do away with gold to rain currency notes;
who spread the earth like a mat and sleep on it,
Neither left nor right,
neither Gandhi nor Marx,
neither non-violence nor violence,
who neither want the earth nor the heaven,
the lords of inexplicable shapes
who create rules that suit them,
who trample on the rich and cheat the poor,
who raise slogans to do away with intellectuals,

who robbed the country thirteen times and came to power,
ah! these great souls;
who catch hold of a fasting man and make him
belch like the contented;
who eat ghee bought with borrowed money and
wipe their mouths with our hands;
Under the excuse of five-year-plan-yajnas
the people who tasted our diaphrams;
who press out oil from sand with their legal machines,
these street magicians
who turn donkeys into horses,
who make tigers eat the husk of paddy
and who transform the earth into heaven
and who straighten the tails of dogs.

4

Look at these fellows who sit on the sand bank;
They are not aware of the roaring sea and the burning sun;
They are always busy—
they scrape the sand and make tombs,
beating it, rolling it they build multi-storied buildings here,
forts there, embankment here and bridge;
and construct canals that carry water in different directions,
and who build dams.
They reap here and cook there and eat luxurious dinner.
O the beautiful, desirable and endless contentment!
O what an intense life between lunch and dinner!

They come,
the old boys. They will come
now with tears, next minute with tinkling laughter,
now with heroic grand costume, chanting the mantras
of peace;
these forked-minds with faces like segmented circles;
these children of rainbow who change their colour
every moment,

they come,
leaning heavily to the left,
raising their left eyebrows,
winking their left eye. They
who in their boyish pranks break pots and pans,
who punish their teachers, clap their hands and laugh,
who for fun will sow a garland of butterflies,
who to have popcorn burn houses, clap and laugh,
they come
the survyors
they come.
Hold your breath and keep quiet
They come
Look they have come!

June 1963

16. Left-Right

Left, right..., right, left;
Damn the adolescent mind that is drilling.
This is not the time
to blindly fix attention on the beam of the balance
and accept the reproaching eye
that concentrates on the indicator.
You ass of a dead tradition
look with your left eye:
This is the 20th century, the time of sending satellites.
Who has got the time to scratch his brain?
Now is the time to leap a century in a day.
Therefore the left-hand ritual is chosen.

Let the right, the right side,
the rightist party be paralaysed.
Take a conch that has turned to left and blow it;
Let the huge army turn left and further left;
let the left flowing river rush
drowning temples, multistoried buildings and religious mutts;
let them be razed to the ground.
In the 20th century itself, O friend,
if the 25th century arrives,
I will be a sputnik and you will be another.

Let us go round the earth from the left side;
To destroy those who sit on the right,
You Arjuna, string an atom bomb to your bow;

throw a gadfly into the right ear
and throw magical ash
at those who are in between.

Lift your right leg and bend it—O man, damn it—
what would have been lost if it were not there?
The extravagant Nature needs an operation;
The left-scientists have taken a vow
to remove the right-leg and do the right thing;
They watch every minute to see that one doesn't lean to
the right;
They examine whether one is not
concentrating on the key-words of the left.

Now stand on your left leg; learn to stand;
limp O soldier, limp on your left leg;
Fix the rocket on the path of progress.
Is it impossible? True. But think that it is possible;
thinking that way, go on preaching.
The more you preach, fitter will be your uniform.
What is important is the cannon available to the left hand,
the cannon ball:
All this left ritual is a cloak to hide.

O Sir, life is a matter of balancing:
When the monkey who has weighed the butter is on the tree,
from the right cats will attack:
The right that is swallowed
will become *Vatapi* inside the stomach.
Even if it expires, how can you stop?

Birth and Death, Day and Night and Seasons
follow an order.
The Sun's wheel turns from the tropic of cancer
to the tropic of capricorn;
The turns left and right take
is the way of world's chariot.

Oct 1963

17. King Elephant's Salvation

Brothers of yesterday are killers of today.
Harmless relatives then,
sworn enemies now.
what will they be tomorrow?
Who are our enemies?

You are the ones who fell into the very well
which you had seen in the dead of night.
After gulping some water
feeling polluted for being saved by a white man,
you performed purification rites;

The distant brother who looks like a crane in penance,
you declared, is your saviour.
You shook hands with those who stayed on the margin
and parrotted again the doctrine of neutrality;
Thinking that talking in sleep is proof of your alertness
you turned aside and moved on to the next chapter
of the dream.

Sirs, who are you?
We who carry your palanquin until we are exhausted,
we people whose heads are filled with straw,
what are we?
Tell me, O Supreme Soul of socialism, O formless,
which is part of it, O principal idol of plans,
whose replica is taken out in the emergency festival,
At least, why don't you tell us
who we are?

The tusker cannot resent the temptation of Khedda,
Five instruments play, and
the chain at a distance clangs sweetly;
with a leg chained to tree, with a mountain of rice infront,
and a howdah on the back. O what a dream!

Big Brother is the rider, he is so kind,
he keeps on playing the hook without letting even a
fly sit on you.
This is the simple story of glorious India!

Come my countrymen, offer your money, gold,
vehicles and... blood!
The loafer who asks 'why, how, what' is a traitor,
Make him wear china silk.
Let him know, there is no escape for us
without ourselves looking like the enemy.

When Gandhi was here pure gold was our goal.
Now 14-carat gold is enough.
Tomorrow brass will be fine. What if we forget how
to test gold?
We have the Yoga of socialism and it is so easy to do.

They have spread a carpet and it is splendid.
You may walk over it or sit on it; it is lovely.
It is made to order to sleep on.
What if there is a pit below it, it is still all right.
All around there are a hundred trained hands to pull.
They are here, yes, they are right here.
If you say it, you will be sent to a mental asylum!
Believe me, O son of India,
no one who stays neutral loses.

Unable to shout for help,
being pulled by the crocodile
the kaliyuga elephant is nodding to the crocodile-story;
Your readiness to sell your soul is unshaken,
and how can you be denied salvation?

Having risen to your level, the herd cannot descend.
There is the gang that pulls the rug under the feet
and in front there is a welcoming well,
and there are packs and packs of wolves in sheep's clothing;
who has the guts to protect us?

As Dange went to Mascow, we must send another
representative—
A statesman to Almighty God. Giving all the reasons,
stressing that there is no alternative to an incarnation,
we have to conspire. There is no other way left for us.

I don't know about the sightless;
but for those who can see, you lord Shiva,
first show us our photograph to make us understand
who we are,
So that we can understand
who our enemies are.

Stop those who are walking towards the well;
knockdown with one blow the crocodile's teeth;
and plug all the wells with mud.

November 1963

18. On The Day of Sri Rama's Birth

On this day of Sri Rama's birth
his name itself is juice and fruit.
Between the unknowns of before-life and after-life.
Life is vivid like *Shabari* burning with hope.

Under the sunburnt soil, the spark of life
waits, itching to sprout
and reach the sky;
to become greenery, grass, thorn and flower.

The soil-clad tiny seed is soaked by rain
and the holy fig tree returns like a daily event;
the rock that flowered on the Gommata Hill
was a mysterious enactment of cause and effect.

The ground-struck dream of flying in the sky
took off on a jet plane for some length
and returned to the earth; the rocket
a modern distortion, spat fire and hit the moon.

A vision shaped itself under the magnifying glass
of *Vedas* and *upanishads*;
out of the ant-hill came a hand and chiselled the vision
beyond the avatars of *Matsya*, *Koorma* and *Varaha*:

The desire of *Kousalya* and *Dasharatha* for a son
had suddenly touched the wheel of Time;
a resplendent head sprang from the fire, its pointed tip
turned downward to be clothed in mud.

And sails wandered early in the morning
Like a royal swan on a sea of milk;
in the bright search-light, the unfolding soul
became the royal trail of Rama's history.

A vigil full of determination : an arrow into the heart
of darkness; a daylight cudgel to the Dandaka forest;
to set fire to Lanka by the love for the daughter
of the earth;
and to bluff, 'she woundn't be touched without a fire
ordeal.'

Yes, Rama's arrow exhibited enormous power,
but how many heads has darkness? a mere ten? or hundred?
You cannot count. When cut, they have grown again
and again,
like throttling fingers, from time immemorial.
So, was Rama's valour worthless?

No, it is a recurring phenomenon; and I wait in the dark
trying to make fire with flint;
having had fruit and juice, I wait in devotion,
with ears expectant for explosion.

Crossing the six mystical stages, will the rocket
carry the message to *Sahasrara?*
without letting the anthill grow around itself
can the mind carve again the firm lines of that Superman?

(c) 1968

19. To Ananda Tirtha

He appeared here, got enlightenment here;
exposed to heat and rain, he bathed here and swam here.
He discharged the skyward arrow here and
he brought down the heavenly rain.

He the prime breath, carried huge rocks
and built a bridge between this world and the other,
pouring forth his soul into the chisel
he made god Vasudeva stay in stone.

In the light of the flame of awareness
he let flow the spring of essences
from the unconscious to the subconscious;
The blissful waters stood deep and its springs
made fertile the arid land.

you carried the flame from Pajaka to Badari
lighting up the hidden and the mysterious;
and in the flame forged the coins with Vishnu's seal
and you constructed a bridge to heaven.

* * * *

I had heard about all this: But what I saw was a fire ordeal
in the eight mutts which you had founded;
You could trust the eight only for a while, but
beyond the expected time, the incredible machine started creaking.

* * * *

Here the wooden chariot is drawn every year,
and rice comes in plenty and the huge brinjal;
and the tanks where the prime soul had bathed
are now stench-ridden and stagnant.

From the fire-pit pure gold comes out in small measures;
In the travails of smoke impurities remain.
Flower, green fruit and buds get burnt
and the lake is full of algae.

* * * *

We see a deformed figure lying poisoned
on the couch of money, gold, material wealth and vehicles;
This is neither fit for this world, nor for the other;
It is like a brass coin plated with gold.

The holy seat built on the firm foundation of 'varnashrama'
has become an island; the earth below is sinking.
Now what can stop the heaving sea?
The sand in the hourglass is running out.

This shore has been waiting for you and the like of you
and our wish is swaying in launches.
Come with rhythms suitable to the times
and bring your smithy, chisel and mint.

Jan 1969

20. Adolescence

I

The princely growth of his moustache sprouting,
Everything is shielded from his eyes, as if
The halter around his neck is loosened, and freedom
Flashes forever; as if
Grass, thicket, plant and hedge are all the same
For his growing horns.
The youth feels as if he is riding an Arab horse;
He is outraged because the sky is high,
Because he cannot go back to his mother's womb,
Because his father was born before him;
Because his mother weaned him.
In his rage, he engages in rhetoric,
And screaming, hops around.

II

At the curve of a treacherous road,
Against the prohibitive signposts,
He leaves the high road for a by-lane,
And tripping returns to the highway,
Knees bruised, hands hurt, and wings clipped.
His deformed face rubs against the nettle of the sky.

His hippy companions, riding the wind, raise
eyebrows, grin from the high branches, and humming
To the monotone lullabies of self-absorption
Doze off. There is no one to admire the majesty
of the mess in which the prince has fallen.
Yet, somehow if he crawls and does not feel disgust at his
own crawling, he may go beyond the narrow bonds;
Or else, he will be the gaurd of his own accursed prison.

III

I am sitting here, on a summer's day, on a mound,
Under the burning sun, smoking a cigarette.

Somewhere, down there, my son sits
In the middle of five fires, crying.
I keep shouting his name; alas, my son
Seems to have gone deaf. Is he really deaf?
Or is it
That he has his own language?
My guts are twisted in anguish for him.
During sleepless nights wearing worn out clothes, boozing,
His hippiedom has tumbled down from his highs;
I see my own reflection in his hapless state.
There's no one to light the lamp
In our grandfather's house;
Ancestors are starved by inattention to tradition;
Perhaps, one should never snap the umbilical cord;
But then, the seed has no qualms about the roots;
It springs afar and spreads its magic sails.
For the whimsy of youth
what shore? What destination and what purpose?

IV

Flintstones through friction
Inseminate the womb of darkness with flame;
One waits in darkness, in solitude,
As gratitude for the sparks of life.
What you can expect is
keeping to the beat of the distant sea,
To pare, press and shape,
And little by little lose the sharpness
Of teeth and nails in self-realization.
Let the wild flame of the torch blaze
To burn the dregs of darkness;
Self-illumination can only be achieved
In ritualistic recital in the Vedic way.

There is the cave door, beyond that
The great plain;
Basketful of greens and fruits;
Growing up has no limits.

Aug 1970

21. Grandfather-Planted Banyan Tree

The grandfather-planted Banyan tree stands like a chariot
before the house;
Its rope-like hanging-roots sway like elephant's trunks
in the cool shade.
The tree is a green sail fluttering in the wind.
Among the waves that roar, progress and retreat,
The stem sprouts upwards in silence.
To a princely wind, the Banyan becomes a magic horse
and salutes again and again at the prince's court
along with the hens, crows, calves and dogs.

Carrying children on its trunk,
it raises them up and brings them down.
They play hide and seek, hop-scotch and blind-man's bluff
in its shade;
they mimic Viswamitra's valour and Lava-Kusha's war
and Krishna's games.
When alone, the tree might become throttling fingers
on the neck.
It fades at dusk,
and at night in torchlight
It makes my heart a drum, beats it and falls silent.
It lives many many years within a day.

Sparrow, 'Kuppala manja', bulbul, parrot and maina
Chatter and worship
every evening; when it drizzles gold,
The male-elephant draws the flower-chariot
to the horizon for daily worship.

With its star-studded howdah it responds to a distant music
and sprouts in its sleepy state
and spreads a dancing shadow of branches and twigs.
The hanging-roots that try to reach the sky
bear fruits and flowers on the soil,
that are too exorbitant, as they are lost in the sky.
By morning, as usual,
the tree, a real dream,
lifts its trunk, salutes,
and stands like a gorgeous green hill.

II

When the sun burns intensly on the distant rock
of the island,
the leader of the herd like a pillar of smoke,
moves away raising its trunk,
trampling fallen leaves and mud;
over a hill, it presses a cliff and trumpets thrice.
In the valley, drums sound around the elephant's khedda.

My magnifier-ego blazed when I saw the Banyan;
but when I sat in the open field under the midday sun,
being caught in the net of affection of do's and don'ts
my mind gasped like a fish.
Then I understood why my father
had sunk into depths of sorrow when I cut
the hanging-roots one by one.
After the stem was cut and cremated
my mind was in doubt
if the rites had been performed well.

III

Why so many hanging-roots for the Banyan?
To carry the weight of ages
in every age, it gets a new row of shoulders. They are
so gentle, so tender and so itchy with desire.
Every branch has little searching fingers
to dig the wind and touch the land
in its downward learning process.

There it goes up, and there;
and here it comes down at the same time;
As it rises, it descends,
joining the top and the bottom.

Its vow is to untie and tie and re-tie the knot of vow
that goes up and down;
it is the hoe of the temple of life.

IV

The log we seem to understand and do not understand
is the source of this self-driven power.
It has the character of wind that comes and goes,
and the banyan dies while straining to become a seed.
All over its body, layer upon layer,
this elephant-soul has layers of carved records.
And while it carries the howdah
on the royal road of reality,
it becomes obedient like a dog under its burden.

It becomes all this,
but it is just a fraction of what it wants to be.
Why is the wind so heavy?
Descending as it ascends,
why this urgency to have hanging-roots as props?

By the time the son starts growing,
the father of hanging-roots broods in the sun;
worn away, waiting and waiting to be reminted,
he dies.

I looked for the roots of one
who was dressed in European fashion;
Are his roots inside or out?
Are they above or below?

Where the Banyan was,
now proliferate the babool, the wild date and shrubs.
Looking at my son, now in the scorching sun,
I'm worried and scared.

Under the Banyan tree there is only mud;
but inside, from navel to top
there is the shadow of a thousand-pillared monastery;
I wait for the miracle that brings it out.

Sept 1971

22. A Golden Pipe For The Crooked Tail

Finally inserting the crooked tail into a golden pipe
The world-redeemer had bites and breathlessness.
With the unbearable weight of the tail Kanakadhwaja
Howled when the wound became septic.

Even with injections, the rabies was not cured
And he bit people who were to his left and right;
In Bengal Gandhi's statue was damaged and beheaded;
when he missed his count, he started again.

Inconclusive fast is an imaginary fallacy,
The gesture of a man not to beat back when beaten;
Having tunnelled beneath religious and governmental institutions
he hesitated to blow them up.

A straight path to heaven is a fancy
because, life is winding-roads and hairpin-curves;
In the refraction of daylight, the sky-blue melting
to make the sun look like a wheel is a matter of time.

The spinal column which straightens up when the
commander comes,
Bends when the drill is over;
For the indicator of the balance to come to the centre
proper weight must be put on the scale.

Violence is unnecessary, violence is necessary;
Let the operating instruments be sharpened on a whet-stone;
Chopping off the thousand hands of Kartaveerya
Is necessary for the maintenance of penance groves.

A log cannot withstand a thunder-bolt striking it;
Talking like a shaman is learnt by rote;
climbing the electric pole and letting the current flow
Is not a task meant for a dwarf.

Numerals are there not only for subtractions but for
additions also.
Subtracting, adding, multiplying and dividing operations
Are necessary for a balance-sheet
So that at the end of life account is found right, on the
judgement day.

Jan 1971

23. This is not What I had Longed for

This is not what I had longed for—
Leaving my wife and children
who gave warmth to my heart,
a place, an ambience
and direction to my listless mind,
I didn't expect to come straight to the Himalayas
and fight with the cold and cook for myself.
Here the lentils do not boil, rice doesn't get soft
and I keep on remembering the aroma of curd-curry
made at home which I cannot
prepare here. Again and again, the same question
plagues me: what is the relationship between
what we resolve, what is possibile and what is achieved?
What is it that resolves? Is it consciousness
Or something beyond it? Perhaps it is a code
programmed in the computer-like genes of
the fathers, the grandfathers and ancestors?
What is one's own?
Do our wishes come true?
For appeasing the gods,
What materials are essential
to feed the sacrificial fire?
What controls the river that stems seething
Quickened by the Himalayas?

II

Tell me, did you not desire it?
Give me your total assessment
with all the details.
Throw a searchlight on every detail
in your life, like the white-ant-eaten crumbling beams,
wooden almirahs, wooden cots and the pillar
at the centre of the threshing floor.
Give details of waves of arguments, counter-arguments,
discussions and quarrels that left their mark
on the sand in 'Mogeri' village;
and in the evening sitting in the verandah,
you watched beyond the temple, colourful clouds
which resembled wandering milchcows,
and beyond them the horn-like peaks of ***kodasi***
and *Korakorati*.

Ask them if you did not desire it?
Also, ask the palm that had always spread its wings,
beating which, it appeared to fly, but which never flew;
Ask the swallows which were always paired
and which came out of their cave-like nests.
Ask the guava tree which yeilded a handful of fruits
and allowed you to play in its shade,
and which shed its skin in winter;
Ask the stars that invited you each night
to the cloud-carved, star-studded cot of wind;
Ask the travellers of the sky who come down,
spreading mushroom-like parachutes
and spread the gospels;
Ask the constant note of the sea which was two miles away,
to whose eternal music your heart was tuned.

III

Memory is hard plaster.
That rainy season when the village tank was full,
out of the man-deep water, a lotus had sprung
opening its lips to the sun;
and I jumped into the water
following others, not knowing how to swim;
I stuck to my uncle's legs
and tried to kick the water;
I missed my hold and without touching the bottom
I raised my hand while sinking down.
I gulped some water and I was almost lost,
when suddenly, I was pulled out by my elder brother
into a new life.
Did I desire that death or this rebirth?

IV

The calf gets tied to the post but its mind
keeps running away to play.
The secret of art is, it is a construction,
but looks as if it is natural.
Tell me which are the places you lived in?
Where are your roots and pendants? Are they in your
place of birth?
Are they in and around Mysore and Chitradurga?
Like a lamp on the threshold
it is neither in nor out.
I went on hopping in and out, out and in, like a frog,
and spent a lot of time
in the soft cushion-like mud;
and all I could gather
was a few particles beyond time.
Stuck to these particles,
did I, like an ant

desire to live under the feet of elephants?
Is my life a miracle?
or is it a boundary conquered by awareness?

The fruit-bearing tree
uprooted from its soil,
can it again strike its roots here?
The clock is ticking.
The day crawls to become the night
and the night becomes another day.
In the clear sky, seeds of storms keep sprouting.
Tanks and lakes are going to be filled.
Is life a dive into the unknown waters,
not knowing how to swim?
or, is living itself death?

Sept 1973

24. The Homeless

The homeless—
Their shelter in the footpaths at night,
Their belongings hanging from branches during the day;
When a rainbow appears suddenly,
energised, they set their arrow and shoot it
in front of closed shops or under park-benches,
or on deserted plots;
Sowing their seeds, separated from them,
they get washed away by the heavy downpour.

In the accidental sky
They disperse like meteors.
As though they were their equals they quarrel with dogs
for thrown-away food in the gutters;
They stand like symbols of rotten, leafless, sun-struck trees.

Their spirits which should have leaped to the
sky like tongues of fire
Disintegrate and crumble into dust.
Under the weights of their Masters and Lords
They fall to the ground like ashes.
In the dark chambers of factories
Where they become cogs of wheels
Their honest breaths fly away through the chimneys
Adding poison to the air.
Forced to breathe the same
They are incited into rebellion, violence and noise;
They find their ecstasy in it and are heard no more.

They work hard, becoming manure to a futureless existence.
Rags, tatters and torn clothes their environment.
And yet,
Carrying load after load of stone, mud and concrete
They give birth to multi-storied skyscrapers.

Look at them.
Have you looked at them? Then
Listen now
To the monologue-murmur of your air-conditioner.

Oct. 1973

25. A Common Man

How dare you call me a Common Man! Your father
is common, in the company of my father,
my grandfather and my great grandfather who are dead.
Hey you, tell me if you know my name.
Does your father own
this face, this stance and this lashless
God's-eye mind of mine ? Faraway you sit in your
airconditioned room and conduct
my funeral rites with your generalisations.
If you have any guts, come out
and look at my palm ; look at the
unique mounts, crosses and lines. I will show you
how in this broken lantern the sooty wick
lifts up its flaming head.

You are the wooden handle of the axe,
which has forgotten the flowering, fruit-bearing tree.
For you everything is the same. A group
means a flock, a flock means sheep
and sheep means mutton. Where is the humanity
in you to call each one by name, feed
and fondle it with endearing words? You know
only to number us and fill up the trucks to the
meat factory. You know only to apply the
same brand name to all the cans. You dream
of tasting me only from the can.
For a piece of bread, you bastard, you
have allowed them to scrape off your nose and face.

You are the tailless fox for whom variety
is sour. You hold the foot-rule and
Scrape off everything until it becomes common.
You, worshipper of the shapeless black money's
jingle, what is the name of the machine
in your chest? Come on, breathe out.

Everything that can breathe has its own history,
its special smile, its own evolution
and direction. It will escape your map
and lift up its flag of individuality
until it can build a palace of light.
I may be an eczema-stricken farmer in torn clothes,
part of a chorus,
or a come-what-may-I-don't-care factory worker in
sooty clothes,
or a limping thrusting-forward beggar on the street.

II

Did you call me a common man? You are mistaken.
Beware, I don't stretch my hands for the handcuffs.
I will bite and tear the noose round my neck
while I close my eyes and muse. Your pistol may
threaten me to march to its tune, but I
will be dancing to a different tune in my mind.
I am a free-born soul.
You, worshipper of commonalities who has scraped
off your face to wear the mask of 'Hiranyaksha',

Your only ambition is to stick to your chair.
Therefore either you chisel off the faces of others
or keep them in jails. But look, look! there
the Great Boar is sharpening his tusks,
waiting for the proper time.
I am the 'Narasimha' caught up in a pillar.
I am also waiting
for the proper time.

May 1976

26. The Earth Is Not Level

Rivers, tanks and wells,
Downs, valleys and dungheaps—
Like this the earth is not level.
Ups and downs and stumblings are natural.

The downs get filled by water; nobody
Desires the toilet water. But
For the everflowing water
Nobody objects.

Well water is drinkable even
If it is filled with mud or covered by algae;
But however magnificent the ocean looks
You can not drink that water.

When the sun who is the soul of the universe
moves his millions of hands
over the waters,
It's an ecstacy, a thrill,
Disintegration of form and metamorphosis.
When any water becomes steam
In its pure state, it rules the sky,
Produces electricity and comes down as rain.

Once they reach the sky
All the waters whether of tank or river
or well or gutter become one.
Tell me where do you find caste?
Isn't it when you are rooted in the soil?

1977

27. The Old Gods Having Died

1

The old gods having died, the new god-children
wail and toil near gutters:
They bend and shrink in the low narrow huts
and crawl over dust, dirt, filth and spit.
They hurry through the streets in between cars, buses,
trucks, autorickshas and legs;
becoming tails of roguish ruffian comets,
they languish in the dark shadows of terrible time.
They look for left-over food, beedi and cigarette stubs
in sweepings, dungheaps and ditches.

2

The great ocean-churning is on for ambrosia.
Poison-men have become gangsters
and files are full of inhuman records.
Though the sun hasn't risen in the East
in every artificially lighted snake-pit
terrible black cobras are waiting.
Many more raise their hoods ready to strike,
on foot-paths, in the corners of cinema houses,
amidst crowds of bus-stands and parks.
Since Abhimanyu was killed unjustly
distinction between day and night has been lost.

The war is on during the day as it was on
during the night. In the array of hotels, factories,
godowns and fields little ones are caught unawares.
O you darlings, you beat your wings in vain in these cages.

This is not the country for you.
Procession-organisers want people like you
to be their day-time torch-bearers:
They want you to be yes-men
to trail behind them and hail them
and cry victory to them.
These masters expect you to scratch your head,
bow and bend before them, and cringe for a rupee;
They provide luxurious conveyance like trucks
for you to greet the gods and goddesses
who return from the dead.

They expect you to be stone-age soldiers
to carry gunny bags full of stones,
to pelt at street-lights and window-panes.
You have to keep pace with the police
to squander light.
Young ones,
your hunger has swallowed the intellect,
violence has swallowed your guts, and
your throat has unknowingly gulped poison.
O God-children, where is the home for you?

Colleges, schools, playgrounds and gymnasiums
are full of poison-youths and poison-ladies.
They are full of venom from top to toe.
Where is that generation
which can keep the poison in the throat
and carry the pot of ambrosia in their hearts?

We the audience wait
for the curtain to drop in the last act.
We wait for the divine light that shines in children's eyes
to engulf and burn the poison into compost.
We wait for shoulder-high crops.

June 1980

28. The Ganga That Never Dries Up

Look, what a predicament for the never-drying Ganga:
the same basin, same stance and sequence of things;
even if new water flows in, the same ancient inebriation,
the same stage and the same play.

In the begining of the year Himalayas melt and come down,
Ambrosia and mud get equally mixed up;
In the rotting deeps there continue to lie
the stale dirt, stink and muddy water.

She has kept gruel in her plate,
Granny Ganga of wrinkled skin;
she doesn't taste even a drop. Before her eyes
float blood-soaked hair, cut-off heads of *Kurukshetra* war.

The battle field of Kurukshetra extends all along the country;
though the roles are same, the actors are different;
Duryodhana is dressed like *Yudhisthira*, and *Shakuni*
like *Krishna*, and *Uttara* is dressed like *Arjuna*.

They came down straight from Akashaganga.
Though they shone here girding their loins,
they shone and disappeared like a will-o'-the wisp,
Rama, Krishna, Buddha and Mahavira.

Their words burnt like camphor, they retreated
caught in the sounds of thunders and stormy waves;
they got bound in books
and their shapes became idols in prayer halls.

The subterranean Ganga is hidden in each heart,
but the bottoms are cracked and dusty.
The thick forest of knowledge on the banks
has become barren and ghosts are howling there.

Let the bottom crack atleast once
And the rosary of *Kurukshetra* go to pieces;
the other person is not there to cut throats
but to make the two rivers flow as one.

Innumberable people of the Gangaless days with
Bhagiratha's determination
are sure to come. The divine Ganga
will become Ganga of the heart;
Again on the banks will spring holy places
and they will lead us to spiritual heights.

Is it a dream ? or imagination?
If not, what else have we here?
needles to pluck the eyes
and sticks to murder.

(c) 1982

29. I Am A Hindu, I Am A Brahmin

A truth told with bad intent
Beats all the lies that you can invent

-Blake

I am a Hindu, I am a Brahmin!
Is it a proclamation of my self-respect
or is it a laxative for those
who needlessly mock me
by calling me a Brahmin?
Let casteism be purged.

II

In the old map I know, these are the lines of my
longitude and latitude
From the north pole to the south;
when every inch is explored, these will prove to be
imaginary lines.
Why should I be proud of them?
Or why should I be anxious or miserable?
Those twisted souls fed on casteism,
those scoundrels for whom castelessness is only a slogan,
those heroes of empty words are insects, and
Worms in the manure of tradition.
They gobble up modernity that sprouts there.
I know, the lines of the old map are fading.
For each generation a new map is necessary,
new longitude and latitude.

III

Nature does not change, not even human nature,
fundamentally;
but ideas on the stage of consciousness are endless.
The world of individuality is full of variety.
We have to recognise the peaks of values
and identify different levels of personal evolution.
The four-fold division of mankind
is a replica of a human truth for all times;
But caste, religion and lineage are pure invention;
a temporary demarcation of status.
But if orthodox people talk about the high caste and low,
that is sheer shamelessness.
And that should be damned!

IV

The greatest achievement of the modern age
is the respect for humanity;
The response from the inmost depths
to anything alive, whether animal or bird,
tree or insect.
Treat them as brethren
with a sense of equality and love for all.
That should be our aim
to climb cultural peaks and be creative.

V

Self respect? To this quark of endless creation?
Let our status be decided after death.
Let even the snail enjoy full-life on this earth.
What punishment for the criminal
who hinders friendly meeting of a living being with another?
You poisonous crawler, you who sting in the guise of man
you are sure to be punished. You viper!

(c) 1982

30. Be Deep - Rooted

Cling to the soil and live like the coconut,
Mango and Banyan trees, each ruling in its own court;
And then grow sprouts, forkings and limb-like branches;
Swing and sway in the wind and become a friend of the sky;
Let the roots spread out and grope gathering earth's
essence for sustenance;
The inner substance has other leanings;
it desires to consume time and transcend time
as the stem stretches out constantly toward the sky.

* * * *

From somewere flew in a seed and landed in my backyard
and became the papaya miracle, shoulder-high;
dancing the still-dance of the town's sole temptress,
as the sap rises, it swings with pleasure;
Just a touch of the wind, she tingles,
her dozen hands swaying, her neck arching,
her saree-flaps flying in a proud posture.
Fruits hang from top to bottom;
And this mother has delivered more than enough to satiate;
She faces the sun through the day; bows to the storm
And towards evening, praises softly the setting sun.

* * * *

Even when the root is there, other roots are grafted.
Though here, what is elsewhere is a disturbing factor.
Dream, imagination, desire and ambition ruffle,
Many plants and many trees become fruitful and fruitless;
The earth with its will aims at the wish-fulfilling tree;
and time jumps stepping on the head of the sun.
If it is fruitful, it is fruitful; if it is fruitless, it is fruitless.
Otherwise the world cannot bear the weight of life;
Outside, there are piles of precious stones and gold;
inside, there is only famine, hard and cruel.

(c) 1982

31. To Ambedkar Bhima Rao

To the matchless archetype of modern Hinduism
To Ambedkar Bhima Rao, our heartfelt salutations.
Though you were born in the midst of dust, dirt and stink
You rose to great heights of mankind.
Your baritone voice stood like an island
in the midst of hubbub, speechification and cacophony.
Swallowing and digesting the poison
of blame, contempt and humiliation
your purity sparkled in the smithy of thought.
We offer our salutation.

II

In the age of Gandhi
when sentimentality blew dust to the eyes
and confusion to the mind,
when every one was a *Trishanku* sinking in his own marsh,
None could recognise the majestic guiding peaks;
In the tumult of transitory feelings
they could not hear the pure feeling of moderation.
All around were dead minds, deaf ears and muted mouths
like storm-striken sails.

III

You were aware of the truth that by sowing chaff
nothing can be grown;
Like Rajaji you also struggled throughout life

to realise the ideal in the present.
Commitement to the unknown
is like jumping into a river
with a stone around one's neck.
The goal is to swim and reach the shore
and not to get drowned.
Not in a palace, but on the thorny
narrow paths of poverty and disrespect
you walked on your own
to reach great heights of mankind.

IV

You were not a warmonger,
You did not shout breaking the flute of the past,
pounding it, powdering it and mixing it with the ale of equality.
Cleaning the flute of disharmony
creating harmonious sounds
you tried to gather the best elements of Hinduism.
But getting tired of it, O intellectual,
no wonder, you surrendered to Buddhism.
Alert in the light of heart-prompted logic,
holding your head high,
you walked to the rhythm of community music.
O my relatives, you who garland him and clamour around,
singing a chorus, walk toward the peak of harmony.

V

At the time of partition, you gave a warning:
"The best solution is to exchange people;
water will not mix with oil;
you cannot graft a baton to a banyan
which puts forth new leaves time and again."
Leaders obsessed with power
did not heed your advice. They somehow managed to
come up

in the roaring flood of blood
and occupied the seats of power.
They pretended to help the poor
and distributed the opium of tall promises.
We suffer the poison produced by this disaster.
we wait for a hero to take it away
while the lava of communalism hurts us spurting again andagain.

VI

The father figure is no more,
who chiselled his own life
and became an idol for helpless mankind.
Your act and speech, thought and majesty
have been fading in the pages of history.
Those who break the flute in your name,
who shout and scream,
and refuse to cut and chisel their own lives into idols,
will carve out your image and build temples,
and push you into darkness,
as they did to Buddha and Gandhiji.

(c) 1983

32. I Feel Happy

I feel happy when a beauty
Swaying like a creeper
comes close and smiles;
My mind becomes a little warm and vibrates
but does not get heated up.
The body like an elephant in rut,
burning with desire, will not burn the howdah
and run amuk trumpeting aloud;
nor will it become a column of fire;
Nor will it like the quaking adolescent
retreat into a corner, hanging down its head.

Like a ghee lamp lighted before god,
Like absolute surrender before a full-blown rose
of matchless scent,
Like the rising feeling of intimacy when an unseen cuckoo
Sings sweetly from somewhere,
there is no regret;
For the root that sleeps in the ripening fruit
Why should there be the agitation
to go down into the soil, to grope and search?

Here is the ember
under the ashes of a dying fire
And before me on the pedestal
There is the idol worshipped by my ancestors.

1983

33. Rebellion

Here, everyone has to rebel until
he seeks out, recognises and climbs
his own throne of gold or iron or wood or mere mud,
Until the earthy life rises up
and reaches the sun's helping hand;
Until one gets one's chance to grow up,
which makes him a part of the sky;
Until one becomes the climate that doesn't hinder
the growth of the plant
beyond the reach of the calf;
even while the calf stands on its hind legs.

Until the spring of self blossoms,
each individual will have to rebel against
parents, against teachers, and the closed fist
of society; so long as they oppress and feed
the orphan stale food
and restrict his growth,
until one's own marks of identity are ready,
until within one's limits, one spreads
his branches and twigs far and wide.

Without real rebellion, spending his time drinking,
the timorous man
is a mockery of mankind.
It's only because the wind touches, taps, pushes and beats,
the disturbed sea reaches out to the sky.

It's only because
the sun continues to burn himself out daily,
water gets heated, becomes vapour and cloud,
flashes of lightning, roaring of thunder and
pouring rain in nature's creative wonders;
climbing higher and higher, from peak to peak
is an inevitable cycle.
How can anyone hope to know the truth
without tackling first the maze in which
one is caught, the truth that seems impenetrable?

Most importantly, one has to declare
endlessly a holy war
against oneself, throughout one's living days:
against the secret fifth column that conspires
inside the inner cave of utter darkness;
against those who come in desirable disguises
to flatter and to extinguish
the lamp of selfhood;
against one's own daydreams which tempt
magnifying one's ambitions;
against secret fears that try to push
us into the pit of despair and laugh out loud;
against distortions that stem from selfishness;
against the neighing of mirages of impossibilities;
against unabashed women
who draw you astray or pull you down;
one has to fight an inner war,
as a vulnerable warrior, a defenceless lonely hero,
one ought to be always fighting, alert___
all ears and all eyes.

The declaration of rebellion
should keep on blaring
until every branch weighs down with ripe fruits;
in order to offer the kernel to others and seeds to the future;

to lay another stone to the foundation of mankind;
if possible, to add another storey to the existing one;
to let the weathercock play on the tower,
even while the vultures assault, time and again,
and the indignant sun heats it red
and the torrential rain soaks it wet;
until the stars open the cloud-curtain
and glance with their blessings—
until, ah, the detached, desireless, selfless,
amazing other worldly smile of
inner peace and contentment of Gommata of Shravanabelagola
is reflected in one's face
enlightening the environment.

July 1984

34. The Face Seen In Chintamani

Ninety percent of the mind is focused
On the talk in the assmebly hall in Chintamani;
The eye wanders from face to face
Searching for an island port to rest for a minute;
To rest and find a face
that mirrors my inmost self, posture to posture, eye to eye,
and heartbeat to heartbeat;
a face that triggers the trill
of secret empathy. Look! over there
rises in the midst of the assembly
the most intimate face!
A face that grasps the intent without anything being said.
What face is it? Whose face?
Where, when, in what life, in what world, and
in which accidental moment
did I see that face
When possibility turned into actual throbbing intimacy?

The lock of selfhood somehow loosens;
the door opens and the intimate self
Overflows and reddens the face...
A moment of wonder that flashes like lightning
the fragrance of immaterial lovely desire;
A bubble of light that shines in the corner of the eye.
The magic of timeless love manifest in a maiden.
Oh! My unworldly mate!
Oh my formless beloved!

This is the moment of motionless eyelashes
When the root of being, stripped of all disguises
Reveals its priceless smile.

2

Holding the wish-fulfilling gem,
The face that I have desired and sought,
my other face; a female face,
A face unfolded in gossamer lines of silk,
The new face of mine that I saw in the looking glass,
What are you? What is your name?
What family? What heritage?
I did not know and I could not know.
For half an hour, my inner voices debated;
The melancholic swan's feet moved in joy.
At the same time
Another king swan had seen this other face,
his own face, in the Manasa lake.

Then once again
Long endless night of separation;
The plight of a hero in the prison
of a lightless island;
circling pillars
Looking here and there
for something unspecific.
Feeling as if he has seen it
but not seeing it,
simmering in the midst of shadows.

Behind every face lies a matchless world;
Faces that believe themselves self-sufficient
hanker after another.
Each one is sentenced to life in these dark waters
under the supervision of a jailor;

now and then, a short boat trip.
Though there are some
who jump off from one island to another, and
swim to saftey,
what they find is completely alien.
If by sheer accident, one gets to look at
the mirror image of one's own other self,
just for a moment,
we should deem him blessed and fortunate.

When is our next meeting? Eye to eye communion?
Serene secret deep communication?
Will I be able to return to this island of intimacy
crossing the seven seas?
Even if I come back, can I really run
into a rare encounter like this?

(c) 1986

Appendix - I

To Tagore

I hugged you once as a thin, pallid cloud,
Content to expend the seed
In night pollutions of misty drops
That burden the leaves and grass;
Frigid as old maids in spotless white,
Ashamed to undress in light;
Too pure to pestle with rodlike showers
Earth-holes itching in heat.

Adolescent on stilts, parader in public,
In brocade, and lace and beard,
Seeking a stave from gossamered horizons
And ripples that lap and lick,
And the wind that sighs in bamboo-copse,
And shades in noontide rings;
Wrapped in skin-tight silken sounds
Bestrode the mystic broom.

I salute you, solemn ghost,
Haunting my childish corners;
Breeder of a host of ghosts in miniature
Flaunting a dozen tongues;
Worn-out dreams have a knack to reappear
And restore the morning snare.

(c) 1961

This is the only poem Adiga wrote in English

Appendix - II

An Interview with Adiga

M. Gopalakrishna Adiga is considered to be one of the greatest Indian poets. His metaphorical brilliance, 'the swiftness of his imagination', his amazing craftsmanship and his rare ability to be intensely personal and at the same time social and political, have earned him his prominence. He has also been attacked by the sympathisers of romantic poets, Bandaya and Dalit poets and also a number of other poets who have failed to achieve excellence. He has been accused of being a 'vaidika' poet, a conservative and a fascist. None of his critics, however, have denied his greatness.

When the progressive movement was in full swing, he became famous in the forties with his lyrics, which expressed his longing for a socialist state and his early mystical longings. In the fifties he became the leader of the modernist movement.

Adiga is our most influential poet. His poetry and his criticism have affected every other form of literature. He wants poetry not only to embody layers of the conscious mind, but also all the strata of the mind. The goal of poetic expression is not titillation, but the search of speech that is natural to the poet for the expression of his individuality. The poet serves the community by the proper use of the unique instrument of speech. He must have the rare ability to see the universal in our time, in whatever form or dress or metamorphosis it manifests. The gap between what one feels and what one says must be narrowed down until thought

itself becomes deed. This is Adiga's message. In 1982 I interviewed him for 'The Times of Deccan.'

Nadig : To what extent are you a socialist? I am asking you this question because your second collection of poems, 'Kattuvevu Navu' represents the 'Progressive' trend.

Adiga : Strictly speaking, I am not a socialist; I am a democrat. I believe in equality. I advocate change and social justice and opportunity for all those who have been left behind during the course of history. They should become individuals as early as possible so that a true democracy may be established here and a richer and more compact culture could ensue.

N : In your next phase, you had a strong anti-totalitarian stance. Can we say that this is a direct outcome of your democratic commitment?

A : Yes. I believe in the individual and variety of living and achievement.

N : The ideal individual as you portray in your poem *'Sri Ramanavamiya Divasa'* is an extraordinary individual. But, as you say in another poem, *'Gondalapura'*, the extraordinary individual is only *'Sekhada elara Khalaru'*, (The scoundrel Seven percent!) Then like Carlyle would you say that some men are always superior to others at all times? How does this square with your democratic ideal?

A : My concept of equality is neither physical nor intellectual. It is a rather spiritual faith in the sacredness of every living creature. This faith implies that every individual should be respected and treated justly. It does not mean for me an all-round equality which precludes a hierarchy of ability, virtue and attainment. The only thing is that the worth of an individual does not depend upon where he is born. There are certainly

superior men and women and there will be such beings in the future also; but the point to remember is that they emerge from all levels of society, from the highest to the lowest. Carlyle, of course, is right in claiming that some men (or women) are always superior to others. Their number is very small.

N : Your idea seems closer to Emerson's, who thinks that the great man is a representative man. Your Rama is a picture of the representative man.

A : Sri Rama or any other great man realises in his life the potentialities of every individual. He shows what a man could be if he grows to his fullest by a determined exercise of the physical, intellectual and moral qualities. In such a man others find their own potentialities and possibilities realised in a tangible human form. Such a great man is only possible in a society where the people aspire high and create an atmosphere for the right kind of human development.

N : You seem to be, even to this day, highly critical of the Left and your attitude may perhaps be summed up as— liberal conservative democrat...

A : Both Leftism and Rightism are extremes which exaggerate a partial truth. I am not a conservative in the sense that I should like to conserve all that has come down to us. I rather believe in the conservation of the eternal truths embodied in any human culture and in finding newer social and verbal expressions for them. I think that in every age of human history people were and have been confronted by the same kind of problems that face us today. In facing and solving such problems we may find guidelines in the experience of our ancestors, the best of whom were certainly no less intelligent than the best of us are.

N : You have been criticised as a 'Vaidika' poet. What do you say about that?

A : That kind of criticism is rather childish. There are some people who seem to take a sort of malicious delight in denigrating me and for them any stick to beat me with is all right. In the special sense of the word 'Vaidika' you know that I don't practise the orthodox rituals nor trade in them. In the general sense of the term, the Vedas being the first great literary philosophical works of our country, all the different aspects of our civilisation are derived from them. Even the heterodoxies such as Jainism and Buddhism only dissent from it. The very language we use, our Kannada itself, is the resultant of the process of culture initiated by the Vedas. Therefore, even the great critics of my poorself are also Vaidikas in spite of themselves. Of course, seriously speaking, such criticism has neither worth nor any potentiality for good. Creativity may spring even in an orthodox Brahmin as much as in a Dalita or Harijan, for it is essentially a human phenomenon which has neither caste, creed, class, time or place.

N : You have several times been asked the question of your allegiance to the Jan Sangh. Isn't it a fact that both in your poetry and in your life you are trying to find a balance between opposites, always as a corrective to any extreme position?

A : I believe that we live in the midst of dualities of different levels and of different kinds. Our effort should be to achieve a sort of balance among the dualities we face. Therefore, whenever there seems to be an over-emphasis on the Leftist aspect of social thinking I have thought that the duty of an intellectual is to stress the virtues of Rightism so that a balance may be achieved. If the vices of Rightism should prevail I should think that my duty is to fight against them, and set froth the virtues of Leftism so that once again a balance may be achieved. And it is only a fascist who can find fault with another individual for believing in

something which he does not like. The Jan Sangh has as much right to exist and propagate itself and convert people, as much as the socialist or the communist party. In a democracy, idealogies should be fought strictly on the level of intelligent arguments and with the noble motive of arriving at the truth or a consensus for the good of the people and the country.

N : You have talked about balance and that is the kind of attempt you have made in your poetry. Let me mention another kind of balance. When there was extreme sentimentality and musicality you thought that, that kind of poetic diction had lost touch with the raciness, rhythm and vitality of the spoken language. You insisted on "Mannina Vasane" (the smell of the soil). That was another corrective stance. But any achievement is always at the cost of something else. Looking back, what do you think you have missed?

A : It is true that we can achieve something only at the cost of something else. True greatness, of course, will be able to hold the different aspects of creative writing in balance. My next effort should be in that direction. Whether I shall achieve that, only time and fate can decide.

N : I believe your poetry has been rightly considered to be the best written in India. But your attempt to write that poetry of wisdom has made the poetry of ecstasy almost impossible. It may be because of this a number of frustrated poets attack you, not with scholarship, study and analysis, but with abuses. I don't blame you for that. But don't you think that the next poetry movement would be in the direction of the poetry of ecstasy and not the poetry of wisdom?

A : As you are aware every good poet has to pass through ecstasy to wisdom. Some may stop at ecstasy and some may pass on to wisdom. At least in the

field of poetry there should not be any demand for uniformity or singleness of method and achievement. Just as life becomes impossible if there is no variety at all, so also poetry. In every age, there should be different kinds of poetry expressing different temperaments, and levels of experience. You are rather speaking of middling poets who fail to achieve individual expression and who, instead of blaming themselves for their failure, try to pounce upon my shadow. If there should be any poet of the first order he will evolve a poetry of a different kind. It may be either of ecstasy or of wisdom. At the same time, however, any good poet hereafter will have to take into consideration the points raised and the norms established so far in our modern poetry.

N : You like Bendre but you don't like Yeats very much. Is it because Bendre is more important to our tradition and Yeats is not so important? Your poetry is somewhat closer to Eliot's ascetic, analytical approach. But I am also aware, Eliot never upheld individualism and democratic values the way you have done.

A : I have learnt many things from Bendre and he is truly one of the many gurus I have. The most important thing I learnt from him is that poetry is ultimately an original use and exploitation of all the resources of Kannada. Though I don't say that he is superior to Yeats, I do admit that he is more important to me in the context of our poetry and culture.. The true craft of poetry however, I admit, I have learnt from Eliot.

N : What are Eliot's limitations?

A : You know that there can be no perfect poetry at any time, even in the future. Greatness in one line of development may appear deficient in other respects. Therefore it is quite natural that Eliot's poetry must also

have some limitations which may be germane to the mode to which he stuck. I never tried consciously to follow Eliot. I took from him a few hints which served my own purpose. While admitting that he is also a guru of mine, I should say that I have admired and done otherwise. The one difference I may point out between my attitude and Eliot's is that he seems to accept too readily the sectarian catholic concept of God while for me God is neither a person nor alien to me. God is neither in heaven nor in hell, not even on earth or any where. To me God is implied in every individual, in everything. If there is no God within me he is irrelevant. He is the suggestion which my living implies.

N : You seem to have learnt a new way of looking at our Sanskritic heritage from Zimmer, Campbell and others. What is it that you have learnt?

A : I have learnt a great deal from Campbell, Zimmer, Gasset, Toynbee and others. I learnt from them the innate and perennial unity of mankind. I have come to believe that the achivement of any country is a result of the combined action of all the peoples of the world, one influencing the other from time to time. Therefore, I include in my tradition not only Kannada and Sanskrit but also English, and through it the cultures of Greece and Rome also. You know that I am of the view that real creativity in this country ended a thousand years ago and began to show signs of a renaissance only in modern times. The greatest treasures of our culture are no doubt in the Sanskrit of the ancient times, the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Mahabharata, Ramayana and the teachings of the Buddha and Mahavira. There, we have the original stuff to which we have to go back so that we may not

only learn many truths of man's life but also get a new impetus for a truly Indian renaissance of Art and Letters.

N : There is a lot of attack against Sanskrit. What should be the place of Sanskrit in our curriculum?

A : I believe that no modern Indian can be considered to be really educated unless he is interested in literature and culture. He must also specialise firstly in his own mother-tongue, secondly in Sanskrit, the great contributor to all our languages, and thirdly in English, the giver of all modern knowledge. In fact, I believe that in all our universities there should be at least a five-year course of literature in which the student specialises in his mother tongue, in Sanskrit and in English. I also advocate that special efforts should be made to teach Sanskrit, strictly on an optional basis, to as many young men as possible, especially from those classes who have had no chance to learn this language for many centuries. Those people who want to conserve the best in our tradition should make it their duty to teach Sanskrit to all sections of our society. In all schools and colleges, there should be facilities to study Sanskrit and encouragement to those who like to study it.

N : A while ago you talked about excellence and superiority. I am still not convinced how your view can go hand in hand with democracy.

A : Here again we have another duality in which balance will have to be achieved. In any democracy there is always a drive towards the lowest common factor among men and their abilities. This is the result of the new value of equality. While accepting this value, people tend to forget the value of excellence in every field of activity. No sensible man can fail to recognise the inequality of intellect and achievement. If this kind of inequality is not recognised, men will be reduced to

the level of warring animals. Unless there are universally recognised modes of excellence and struggle to attain them, man's life loses all its human significance. Therefore, even in a democracy, wisdom consists in recognising the aristocracy of intellect and achievement and providing for its continued exitstence. Matters like Science, Art and Literature should be recognised as fields of specialisation and must be left to the care of experts so that the great human tradition may continue for the benefit of all men. In our country there is a lot of confusion between the idea of the equality of men in political and social matters, and the inequality of men in intellect and creativity. Steps should be taken to make this difference known to all the people, so that, even in a democracy the highest achievement of unique individuals may be possible. The two concepts are not contradictory but complementary. An individual can achieve excellence only in an atmosphere of social encouragement or at least tolerance and what an individual achieves is the result of all the people working to create an atmosphere for the right kind of human development.

May 23, 1982

Appendix - III

Glossary

Page - 8 *Vinayak* : Elephant-headed god who is worshipped in the beginning of auspicious rituals.

Page - 12 *Rangavalli* : A traditional pattern made especially during festivals with finely ground rice.

Page - 14 *Deepavali* : Festival of lights.

Page - 18 *Dhritarastra-love* : After the kurukshetra war in which the blind king Dhritarastra loses all his hundred sons, the pandavas go to seek his blessings. Dhritarastra who is seething with rage, especially against Bhima, wants to crush him in his tight embrace. Krishna arranges to push a brass-statue as Bhima, which goes to smithereens. Krishna's foresight saves Bhima.

Page - 19 *Lac-magic-palace of Mother-Earth* : The reference, here, is to an incident in the Mahabharata in which owing to his enemity with the Pandavas, Duryodhana constructs a palace of lac, in which he plans to burn the Pandavas.

Adiga compares the earth to the palace of lac.

Page - 19 *Karna, Radha and Kunti* : As Kunti gives birth to Karna before her marriage, she abandons him to the Ganga river and the child is rescued by the

fisher woman Radha. Kunti secretly meets the grown-up son Karna only to take a promise from him that would make him helpless in the war against Arjuna. Her visit results in Karna's death.

Page - 20 *Suruchi, Uttanapada, Dhruva* : Suruchi was the younger wife of King Uttanapada and Dhruva was his son by the first wife.

Page - 20 *Viswamitra, Trishanku* : King Trishanku who desires to go to heaven physically approaches the sage Viswamitra. Vishwamitra with his power of penance sends Trishanku to heaven. But Indra pushes him down. Hearing the cry of Trishanku who is falling upside down, Viswamitra with his power of penance stops him in mid-air.

Page - 23 *Krouncha birds... Ramayana* : Once the famous sage Valmiki, the author of the first epic Ramayana, witnessed a hunter shooting down one of the cohabiting Krouncha birds. Valmiki was deeply disturbed and he cursed the hunter. His utterance came out in the form of a couplet, and later the Ramayana was composed in the same metre.

Page -28 *The son of 'Vinata'* : King Kashyapa asked his two wives to select any boon they liked. One of his wives, Kadru, chose to have one thousand cobras, and the other wife Vinata chose to have two sons. Kadru laid a thousand eggs and Vinata laid two eggs. When Kadru's eggs hatched first, out of jealousy Vinata broke open one of the eggs. A half-grown child, Aruna came out of it who later on became the charioteer of the Sun. After many years, out of the remaining egg of Vinata, came out Garuda, fully grown and powerful. Garuda chose to be the carrier of Lord Vishnu.

Page -35 *Bhagavata* : In 'Yakshagana' type of folk-plays, the 'Bhagavata' sings the entire narrative of the play and also controls the duration of the performance.

Page -38 *Somaka* : A king who on the advice of priests scarificed his only son.

Page -42 *Vatapi* : The Rakshasa who used to kill the Sages by inviting them for meal. He was punished by Sage Aagastya.

Page -43 *King Elephant's Salvation* : In this myth an elephant which is a devotee of Lord Vishnu is caught by a crocodile in a river. Feeling helpless and desperate the elephant cries to Vishnu for help and he saves it.

Page -45 *Shabari* : A tribal woman. She eagerly waits for years to meet Sri Rama. Hearing about Sri Rama's coming she gathers a lot of fruits. Before offering the fruits to Rama and Lakshmana, she bites each fruit to test if it is good. Sri Rama offers salvation to her.

Gomata Hill : It is a hill at Shravana Belagola, in Karnataka, on which stands a 58-foot monolithic image of Gommateswara carved in 981 A.D. It is an image of extraordinary beauty.

Matsya, Koorma, Varaha : Various incarnations of God Vishnu.

Page -47 *Kousalya and Dasaratha* : They are the parents of Sri Rama.

Sahasrara : Literally it means a thousand petalled lotus. In the human body, according to Yoga, there are six energy centres. Sahassara is one of them and is said to be in the front part of the brain.

Page -48 *Ananda Tirtha* : Madhavacharya, the founder of the Dvaita school of philosophy, called himself Ananda Tirtha in all his writings.

Page - 56 *Thousand-Pillared Monastery* : There is a Thousand-Pillared Jaina Monastery in Moodabidire town, in Dakshina Kannada District.

Page - 60 *Kodasi*

Korakorati : Names of two hill stations.

Page - 66 *Narasimha* : This is the fourth incarnation of Vishnu as Man-Lion. To rescue his devotee Prahlada, who was persecuted by his demon-father, Vishnu came out of a pillar in Man-Lion form and killed the demon.

Page - 68 *The old Gods Having Died* : Adiga calls the Dalits the new God-children.

Page -71 *Kurukshetra* : The name of the battle field where the Mahabharata war took place.

Duryodhana, *Yudhistira*, *Shakuni* etc., important characters of the Mahabharata epic.

Page - 72 *Bhagiratha* : In order to conduct the funeral rites for the 60,000 sons of Sagara, Bhagiratha did penance to bring the goddess Ganga from heaven. Again he did penance for a 1000 years to please Lord Shiva to receive Ganga on his matted hair. Shiva's hair held Ganga, and let out only one drop which became the Ganga river.

Gommata : See the earlier note.

Page - 84 *Chintamani* : Name of a town in Kolar District. Also it means the wish-fulling-stone.

Page - 85 *Manasa Lake* : A lake on the Himalayas. Also it means the waters of the mind.

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Gopalakrishna Adiga (1918-1992) is one of the greatest Indian poets of the twentieth century. He launched 'Navya' school of poetry in 1950s which had deep influence on the younger generation. He set out to give poetry a touch of reality. The images, in his poems, are drawn from contemporary city life and the ironic mode examines the failures of Indian culture, society and politics. Poets can learn from Adiga hitherto unknown strategies of poetic expression for their raid on the inarticulate. In him great poetry and great craftsmanship go together.

Adiga was honoured with Kabir Sanman (1986), Sahitya Akademi Award (1975), Karnataka State Sahitya Akademi Award (1974), Kumaran Asan Award (1979) and the Vardhamana Award (1980).

Sumatheendra Nadig (b.1935-) is the influential poet of modern Kannada. He is a critic and an accomplished translator as well. He has translated a number of books into English. His introduction to this collection is the token of his rigorous study on Adiga.

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